



RABBI EZRA BEN  
SOLOMON OF GERONA



פירוש שיר השירים  
Commentary on the  
Song of Songs



and Other Kabbalistic  
Commentaries



Selected, Translated, and  
Annotated by Seth Brody



TEAMS



Commentary Series

**Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona**

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*Commentary on the Song of Songs*

**and Other Kabbalistic Commentaries**

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Published for TEAMS

(The Consortium for the Teaching  
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## Preface and Dedication

The texts included in this volume were selected by Seth Brody, late Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Haverford College. Brody translated and annotated most of the texts, leaving perhaps less than a quarter of the work to be completed at the time of his tragic final illness and untimely death on the Intermediate Sabbath of Passover, 5556 (April 1996). It has been my sad task and great privilege, as Seth's teacher and mentor, to do for his work what I might have hoped he one day would have done for mine. As my work here is merely a completion of his, I did not deem it necessary to distinguish our efforts from one another. I am, however, responsible for all introductory materials with the exception of the introduction to the Zohar on Lamentations, which I was able to edit from Brody's notes.

I do not know to whom Brody had planned to dedicate this volume; no such indication was found in his notes. All I can do is offer it in his own memory, that of a young rabbi and scholar filled with love of Torah and overflowing with excitement about the work he still planned to do, both in the realm of historical scholarship on Kabbalah and in the creation of a contemporary Jewish mystical theology. The loss of this great voice to the worlds of Jewish scholarship and theology is dwarfed

only by the personal loss suffered by his parents, friends,  
and students. May his memory serve as a source of  
blessing to us all.

ARTHUR GREEN  
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY  
OCTOBER 1997

## A Note on Sources

Like most medieval Hebrew writings, the texts translated here are replete with quotations from Scripture as well as from the classic compilations of early rabbinic literature. Biblical books are referenced by standard abbreviations. References to rabbinic texts use generally accepted form and refer to standard editions. Mishnah references are to tractate, chapter, and pericope, e.g., *Berakhot* 4:11. Talmudic references, marked b. for Babylonian Talmud and y. for Yerushalmi or Jerusalem Talmud, are then listed by folio in the standard editions, e.g. b. *Sanhedrin* 21b. Referencing styles to Midrashic works vary considerably, but the chapter indications here should provide the reader with sufficient guidance for use of the various modern or critical editions.

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## On Reading Kabbalistic Texts

The traditions of mystical theosophy elucidated and taught by Jews in Provence, Catalonia, and Castile in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries have come to be identified as the intellectual Kabbalah.<sup>1</sup> The present volume contains one of the most important and earliest texts composed in this tradition, along with two briefer late thirteenth-century examples of its use. In order to appreciate these texts as they were intended to be understood, some brief introduction to Kabbalistic use of language is required.

The most important creation of the Kabbalists lies in the realm of mystical symbolism and the daring reincorporation of myth into Judaism. When reading some of their writings, most particularly the Zohar, considered the crowning achievement of medieval Kabbalah, one can easily gain the impression that it is more the mythical than the mystical that lies at the heart of the Kabbalistic enterprise. The essential myth of a divine/cosmic unity rent asunder and in search of reunion is told through a vast array of symbols. These are arranged in a tenfold grid of associative clusters called the ten *sefirot*. The *sefirot* (literally “numbers”) are presented as a series of

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<sup>1</sup> Distinguished from “practical” Kabbalah, essentially the magical side of esoteric Judaism, and also (primarily thanks to the writings of Moshe Idel) “ecstatic” Kabbalah, a contemplative praxis transmitted primarily in the school of Abraham Abulafia.

primal divine emanations, stages in the advancing flow (both premundane and constant) of divinity toward the lower world and the mystic's mind. Simultaneously these *sefirot* also serve as stages in the mystic's ascent and the ascent of the worlds and rungs themselves as they seek reinclusion within the undifferentiated Godhead.

But seen functionally rather than hypostatically, each of these ten *sefirot* is in effect a group of terms or verbal pictures (they are indeed the richest "iconography" of medieval Judaism), each member of the cluster identified with all the others. Thus the Kabbalist might speak of the "right hand" of God, or of silver, milk, morning, south, the myrtle-branch, or the love of Abraham. One who knows the Kabbalistic system understands that all of these are symbol-terms of the fourth cluster, usually designated by the lead-term *hesed* or compassion. In the course of his discourse, especially if it comes (as so often) in the form of commentary on Biblical or early rabbinic sources, the author will switch from one of these symbols to another without missing a beat, at each step reinforcing the cluster of associations in the reader's mind. While talking about the same *sefirah* or pair of *sefirot* in union, the writer may with utmost symbolic grace let his thought flow from water imagery to that of light, from sexual metaphors to those of one or another of the commandments, and thence on to beasts and birds or Jerusalem and the history of the Jews. Significantly, each cluster contains both terms derived from nature (sun and moon, heaven and earth, trees, wells, streams, and oceans) and figures from the Jewish cult. Within a given cluster, all terms bear the same valence and are interchangeable with one another.

In this way the Kabbalists created a symbolically enriched language, a linguistic entity given a new profundity by this network of associations reaching across bounds of nature, Scriptural text, and Jewish religious tradition. This language was seen as the appropriate one for speaking of the inner life of God, a matter too elevated and glorious to be conveyed by the ordinary linguistic vehicle. Since for the Kabbalist, as Elliot Wolfson has aptly noted,<sup>2</sup> hermeneutics and experience are fully united, we may say that to speak sefirotic language is itself to enter the world of the *sefirot* and to live on that intensified plane of being.

The works presented in this volume represent two stages in the unfolding of Kabbalistic language. Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* belongs to the Geronese School, which may be designated as the "second generation," but the first full flowering of writing in the Kabbalistic mode. The Zohar to Lamentations and R. Bahya's Commentary to the Torah were both written about fifty years after R. Ezra's work, in Castile and Catalonia respectively. The following brief conspectus of symbolic associations, intended specifically for use in connection with the texts translated here, necessarily includes terms used in both periods and must therefore be used with some caution. A much fuller Kabbalistic symbolary is Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's *Gates of Light*, written by an important Kabbalist close to the

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<sup>2</sup> *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 383ff.

circle of the Zohar and now available in English translation.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, for the reader's convenience the following brief list may be helpful.

1. *KETER*

Highest Crown. Nothing. The Nothingness of Thought. Intellect.

2. *HOKHMAH*

Wisdom. Lebanon. Wine. Primordial Torah.

3. *BINAH*

Understanding. Mother. Repentance. Jubilee. Fiftieth Gate.

4. *HESED*

Compassion. Abraham. South. White. Morning. Silver. Milk.

5. *DIN; GEVURAH*

Judgment. Isaac. North. Red. Dusk. Gold. Blood.

6. *TIFERET*

Glory. Jacob. The Blessed Holy One. Solomon. Peace. Truth. East. Bridegroom. Sun. Heaven. Written Torah.

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<sup>3</sup> *Gates of Light: Sha'are Orah*, trans. Avi Weinstein (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994).

7. *NETZAH*

Eternity. Victory. Cherub.

8. *HOD*

Beauty. Cherub.

9. *YESOD*

Foundation. Joseph. Phallus. Sign of the Covenant.  
Righteous One.

10. *MALKHUT; SHEKHINAH*

Kingdom. Indwelling Presence. Jerusalem. King David.  
Rachel. Bride. Temple. Tent of Meeting. Moon. Ocean.  
Earth. Vagina. Oral Torah.

For a fuller introduction to exegesis in the Kabbalistic mode, including some comparison of Kabbalistic symbolism and medieval Christian allegory, see Frank Talmage's "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism" in *Jewish Spirituality I*, ed. A. Green (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

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## I

### **Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona** *Commentary on the Song of Songs*

#### **Editor's Note**

The commentary of Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona (d. ca. 1245) on the Song of Songs is one of the most important texts of the first clearly identified circle of Kabbalists, those operating in the Catalonian town of Gerona at the middle of the thirteenth century. This group, the best-known members of whom are R. Ezra and R. Azriel, claimed to have been initiated into the Kabbalistic mysteries through the teachings of R. Isaac the Blind, son of the well-known legal as well as mystical authority R. Abraham ben David of Posquières, the earliest historical figure linked by tradition to Kabbalistic teaching.

As the earliest Kabbalistic commentary to the Song of Songs, R. Ezra's work may be seen as one that had a truly pivotal influence on the future development of Jewish mysticism. While the origins of Kabbalistic symbolism as a whole are complex and recondite, among its clearly distinguishing characteristics is the large scale reappropriation of natural and erotic symbols into the language of Jewish theology. Both of these are grounded largely in the exegetical traditions surrounding the Canticle, and the commentary of R. Ezra must be seen as

a primary channel through which they came to be accepted. Kabbalah in its most classic manifestations, the Zohar and related works of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, would be unthinkable without the great infusion of Song of Songs interpretation offered by R. Ezra and his successors, including R. Moshe of Burgos and R. Isaac Ibn Sahola.<sup>4</sup>

The Zohar, composed in Castile some forty to fifty years after this work, is replete on nearly every page with allusions to the Canticle. The great lushness of natural imagery, so central and striking a characteristic of the Kabbalistic imagination, is nourished in large measure by constant reference to the Song's gardens, mountains, flocks, and flowing springs as well as its lovers themselves. It is fully taken for granted by the Zohar and its circle that all of these allude to the upper realms, the symbolically described universe of the *sefirot*, chief object of the Kabbalists' attention. This transition from the very earthly setting of the Canticle itself to the realm of sublime symbolism was brought about largely through the influence of R. Ezra's work.

There is much to be learned from R. Ezra's commentary about the way Kabbalistic authors inserted themselves into the rabbinic tradition. While critical of those philosophical interpreters who possess "neither wisdom nor insight" and "turn words of holiness into profanity," the highly radical character of the Kabbalist's own

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<sup>4</sup> The commentary of R. Moshe is lost. That of R. Isaac was published from a single surviving manuscript by A. Green in "Rabbi Isaac Ibn Sahola's commentary to the Song of Songs," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987), 393–491.

reading of the text is slipped unstatedly into the classic garb of the rabbinic reading, in which the Song of Songs is a dialogue, spread over Jewish history, between the Holy One and the Jewish people, personified in the figure of “Community of Israel.” Some of this reading is preserved in R. Ezra’s commentary, and he surely takes no pains to deny it. But as the text unfolds it is clear that the chief focus here is that of union *within* the Godhead, rather than between God and His people Israel. It is *shekhinah* or *malkhut*, the feminine tenth *sefirah*, who unites with Solomon or the Glory, or who ascends with Him to their shared source in the font of *hokhmah*, which makes this work truly a Kabbalistic one.

The *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is the major extant work of Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona. He also authored commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* (no longer extant) and on sections of the Talmudic *Aggadah*. Several epistles and smaller fragments are also attributed to him, including an important discussion of “The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge.”<sup>5</sup>

The present work, long attributed to R. Ezra’s better-known contemporary Moses Nahmanides, was first published in Altona in 1764. That poor edition, copied many

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<sup>5</sup> See the discussion by Gershom Scholem in *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), pp. 370–71. See also the frequent references to R. Ezra in Moshe Idel’s *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), index s.v. Ezra of Gerona and Elliot Wolfson’s work cited above, index s.v. Ezra ben Solomon. “The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge” is translated in G. Scholem’s *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), p. 65ff.

times over by various printers, has been included in Charles Chavel's edition of Nahmanides' writings, Kitvey RaMBaN, published by the Rabbi Kook Institute of Jerusalem in 1963. Fortunately, better manuscript versions of the text abound, though a critical edition of this important text is still a desideratum of Kabbalistic scholarship. The present translation has been undertaken in consultation with the Jewish Theological Seminary's manuscript designated Lutzki 1059. In all but a few cases the manuscript reading was preferred over that of the printed text.

In the course of commenting on the Song of Songs, R. Ezra allows himself several digressions, typical of Hebrew exegetical literature in his day. The largest of these is a treatise on the six hundred thirteen commandments and the way each is derived from its root in the decalogue. Chavel treats this text as a separate work, published following the *Commentary*. We have followed the lead of Georges Vajda, French translator of the *Commentary*,<sup>6</sup> in eliminating this lengthy and somewhat technical digression. We have, however, retained its introduction and conclusion, which are of more general interest. Several shorter digressions from the text, including a commentary on Job 28 in the context of a discussion of Wisdom, an important treatise on creation via a commentary on Psalm 104, and various historical/eschatological discussions, are retained.

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<sup>6</sup> *Le Commentaire d'Ezra de Gerone sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (Aubier-Montaigne: Paris, 1969).

## Introduction

Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel, for all eternity.

At the dawning of His Kingdom,  
God founded a throne for His dwelling,  
establishing it through His spirit,  
making it through His mighty arm.  
He brought forth wisdom and understanding,  
treasure without limits.  
From there flow the lives of souls;  
all the worlds draw their existence.  
Who can comprehend God's comings and goings,  
His intentions,  
save Moses who held fast to His presence,  
who attained a firm stance upon His foundations,  
as it is written:  
"He grasps hold of His throne, He spreads His cloud  
over him" [Job 26:9].

When God established His throne during creation's six  
days,  
he formed two fawns,<sup>7</sup>  
twins of a gazelle,  
placing them in a domicile of delight,  
a chamber with figures inlaid.  
Nothing was denied them,  
no false divinity

---

<sup>7</sup> Adam and Eve.

nor anything of evil  
was in their midst.  
The intent of their creation  
was that they would be a seed of truth,  
“holy seed their stock” [Isa. 6:21],  
so that they might stroll among stones of fire,<sup>8</sup>  
among the angelic watches,  
while the *shekhinah* herself would walk in the lower  
worlds.

So it was until a crafty man arose.  
Iniquitous, endowed with jealous plots,  
he devised deeds of wickedness,  
enticing and misleading the gracious lady  
with his blandishments.  
Eschewing aforethought,  
she observed not her commandment  
but followed his counsel.  
Swayed by her eloquence,  
by the sweetness of her lips,  
her husband followed her lead.  
Thus a spirit of impurity  
descended upon them,  
transformed them,  
bound itself to them and to all of their descendants,  
as it is written:  
“But see, this did I find: God made men righteous but  
they invent  
multitudinous contrivances” [Eccles. 7:29].

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<sup>8</sup> Following Ezek. 12:13–14, referring to the angels.

Seeing his molten image having proved deceitful,  
the human repented,  
and conceived Seth in his image and likeness.  
Seth conceived Enosh;  
from them came Enoch who walked before God,  
knowing and cognizing Him in truth.  
As it says:  
“And Enoch walked with God” [Gen. 5:22].  
Generations passed until Noah’s arose,  
the tenth in count since Adam’s.  
He too knew God with a perfect knowledge,  
prudence dwelling with Wisdom.  
Thus Noah found favor in God’s eyes,  
as it is written:  
“And Noah found favor” [Gen. 6:8].  
Among Noah’s three sons,  
Shem was chosen, for he was the first born,  
recognizing his Creator,  
knowing and cognizing Him in faith.  
His descendent Ever grasped hold of God’s path,  
upheld its steps,  
was chosen from his entire generation  
to be singled out for fame and praise.  
By means of a knowledge  
complete, lucid and pure,  
Shem and Ever comprehended the rational command-  
ments  
and statutes divine,  
setting right the branches on high.  
And they charged the multitudes  
to walk in God’s paths.

The generations progressed.  
The tenth after Noah's  
was distinguished by the man  
chosen from the womb since the dawn,  
our father Abraham.  
He perceived a knowledge of his Creator  
transcending his predecessors',  
comprehending God's reality  
in a manner formerly unknown.  
He began to call upon God's name  
among all of the nations and kingdoms,  
as it is written:  
"And there he built an altar to the Lord  
and called upon God's name" [Gen. 12:8].  
And it says:  
"He planted an oak in Be'er Sheva  
and invoked the name of the Lord, the God of the  
world" [Gen. 21:33].  
Since he took possession of the attribute of divine love,  
his son Isaac was chosen from among all of his sons  
and offspring.  
As it is written:  
"God said to Abraham:  
'Do not be distressed over the boy or your handmaid;  
whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says,  
for it is through Isaac that your offspring will be con-  
tinued'" [Gen. 21:12].  
Isaac attained knowledge of his Creator,  
he too exhorting his sons to walk in God's ways,  
as it is written:  
"he built an altar there and invoked the Lord by name,

pitching there his tent” [Gen. 26:25].  
He took divine justice as his portion.  
When his son Jacob was born,  
the image of the likeness of the blessed Holy One,  
engraved on the Throne of Glory,  
manifested itself in the world.  
For Jacob grasped the attributes of justice and mercy  
a path equalized and balanced,  
so that his ways were imbued with truth  
and the paths of peace.  
For fourteen years  
he studied in Ever’s school  
and from his father Isaac  
and his grandfather Abraham,  
he received the knowledge of God.  
Thus, *shekhinah*’s glory was revealed to him.  
Then the three patriarchs formed a chariot-throne  
for Him who rides the ancient highest heavens [Ps.  
68:34].  
They fulfilled the Teaching and commandment,  
serving their Creator by knowing Him;  
their worship lacking nothing.  
“For Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge:  
My commandments, My laws and My teachings” [Gen.  
26:5].

Twelve sons were engendered by Jacob,  
righteous and good,  
who recognized the Creator, be He blessed,  
and knew Him as they had learned  
from their father Jacob.

From their knowledge and perceptions of the Creator,  
they too observed the commandments:  
“Judah said to Onan:  
‘Join with your brother’s wife  
and perform your levirate duty with her,  
and provide offspring for your brother’” [Gen. 38:8].  
So matters unfolded  
until our father Jacob’s descent to Egypt,  
engendering offspring,  
twelve tribes in the likeness of that which is on high,  
the tribes of Yah,  
the community of Israel,  
whose numbers came to fulfillment at seventy.

After that generation,  
they were immersed in Egypt,  
among a people lacking comprehension,  
whose speech was subtle and obscure  
whose languages were different from their own.  
Israel adopted their ways and abominations,  
learnt their customs,  
grew ignorant of the knowledge of God  
inherited from their ancestors, elders, and primal  
progenitors.

Then God in His compassion,  
sent them His beloved prophet, Moses,  
faithful of His household.  
He called to Moses, revealing Himself in a bush,  
the angel Michael with *shekhinah*’s glory.  
God charged Moses  
to inform the people that the time had come;

having seen their oppression,  
their merciful father  
would extricate them from their imprisonment and  
captivity.

With Moses' own words did the process commence:

“Moses said to God:

‘When I come to the Israelites and say to them

“The God of your fathers has sent me to you,”

and they ask me “What is His name?”

what shall I say to them?” [Exod. 3:13].

Israel's fundamental question,

the essence of all mystical intentionality

and the mystery of faith,

is this very query:

“What is His Name?”

It is the desire to know its origin,

the manner in which the name

is bound to the Primal Cause.

In that holy place,

Moses received the knowledge of God,

learning that the divine possesses three names

composed of twelve letters,

faces within faces, ten *sefirot*,

existence within existences.

In verification of his mission,

God explained:

“Thus shall you say to the Israelites,

‘EHeYeH sent me to you.’”

Scripture further states:

“And God further said to Moses:

‘Thus shall you speak to the Israelites:  
“YHVH, the God of your fathers,  
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,  
and the God of Jacob has sent me to you,””  
placing the name EHeYeH aside  
and commencing with YHVH,  
adding and explicating:  
“This shall be My name forever,  
This is my appellation for all eternity” [Exod. 3:15].  
And in that conversation God said:  
“And when you have freed the people,  
they shall worship God on this very mountain” [Exod.  
3:12],  
promising them that God would appear to them face to  
face,  
and that they would see God’s glory with their very  
eyes.  
To extricate some of the populace  
from their darkness and doubt  
concerning the veracity of Moses’ prophecy,  
God said:  
“Behold I will come to you in a thick cloud,  
in order that the people might hear  
when I speak with you  
and so trust you ever after” [Exod. 19:9].  
In that holy convocation  
the people directly saw *shekhinah*’s glory,  
viewing seven partitions of fire,  
moving them to the fear of God and faith in His  
goodness.  
As soon as they heard that voice,

their souls almost departed from their bodies,  
just as occurred among the nations,  
as it says:

“Has any people heard the voice of God  
speaking from amidst the fire  
as you have and lived?” [Deut. 4:33].

And as it says:

“All the world’s kings acknowledged you,  
for they heard the words of Your mouth” [Ps. 138:4].

During that holy convocation,  
Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu,  
seventy of Israel’s elders and all of Israel  
attained an illumination concerning God’s reality  
and the essence of God’s glory,  
each and every one in accord  
with his perfection, ability, and power.  
There were varied rungs among them,  
some more inward, some outward,  
some higher, some lower.

From this true knowing  
the holy Torah was revealed,  
coming forth from an inner voice,  
spreading forth into seventy branches,  
the seventy “faces” of the Torah.  
These are the multiple meanings of its verses,  
ever changing and transmuting in every direction:  
from pure to impure,  
forbidden to permitted,  
ritually fit to ritually disqualified,  
each parallel to its opposite

containing within themselves the ability  
to declare a given reptile both pure and impure.

From that moment the prophets  
who would arise in every generation  
received their prophecies,  
and the sages who in the future  
would ascend to greatness  
received the fundamentals  
of their teachings, rulings, and debates.

As it is written:

“From the beginning, I did not speak in secret;  
From the time anything existed, I was there.  
And now the Lord God has sent me,  
endowed with His spirit” [Isa. 48:16].

And it is also said:

“The Lord spoke all these words  
to your entire congregation  
on the mountain, from amid the fire, cloud, and mist,  
a great voice that did not cease” [Deut. 5:19].

From that period until now,  
there never ceased to be a generation of Israel  
to which the heritage of Wisdom,  
that is the knowledge of the divine Name,  
was transmitted through the tradition of Oral Torah.  
For our master Moses,  
when death drew near  
and the transmission of Wisdom was concealed from  
him,  
handed this wisdom to Joshua,

as it is written:

“Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom,  
for Moses had placed his hands upon him” [Deut. 34:9].

And Joshua transmitted it to the elders,  
who sustained their generation  
and were Israel’s leaders,  
praying for them during periods of trouble.  
All Israel obeyed them  
and were directed by their instruction,

as it is written:

“Israel served the Lord during the lifetime of Joshua  
and the lifetime of the elders who lived on after  
Joshua” [Josh. 24:31].

And the elders transmitted to the prophets.  
From the prophets it was given to the Men of the Great  
Assembly:

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Mordecai,  
Zerubavel and Ezra,

the last among them being Simon the Righteous.

Afterwards, this wisdom came to the masters of the  
Mishnah.

At the hour of his death,

R. Judah the Prince transmitted the tradition of wisdom  
to his son Simon.

Thus R. Akiba and his companions entered the Garden.

And when R. Yohanan b. Zakkai and R. Eliezer b.

Arakh

discoursed upon the mysteries of the Chariot,

an angel responded from heaven, saying:  
“Such indeed is the work of the Chariot.”<sup>9</sup>

Since then God’s Temple has been destroyed  
and the numbers of sages has dwindled,  
wisemen have ceased  
and the pious and saints  
for whose sake miracles were wrought  
are no more.

The exile continues to worsen  
and our sufferings proceed,  
indeed undergoing constant renewal,  
there being neither anyone to impart knowledge  
nor comprehend tradition.

And thus this wisdom ceased from Israel.  
Wisdom was lost and with it Torah.  
No one knew its interpretation and subtleties,  
exegesis and the reasons for its commandments.  
For a powerful connection exists between this wisdom  
and the commandments’ meanings,  
the Torah’s interpretation and the words of tradition,  
many passages of Scripture being based upon it.

Instead, interpreters arose  
possessing neither wisdom nor insight,  
whether they turned either towards the right or the left.  
They turned words of holiness into profanity,  
diminishing Scripture  
adding, subtracting, enhancing,

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<sup>9</sup> b. *Hagigah* 13a.

interpreting passages spoken through the holy spirit,  
from a quarry of sacred gems,  
in terms never to be entertained by human  
consciousness,  
let alone spoken,  
and how much more so transcribed in a book.

I call such interpreters  
those who

“overturn the words of the living God, the Lord of  
Hosts” [Jer. 23:36].

Concerning this dual cessation of wisdom  
and its nullification in Israel,  
the prophet, trembling, devastated, and sighing, said:  
“Many are the days which will pass in Israel  
without the God of truth and without instruction” [Isa.  
30:21].

By the phrase “without the God of truth”  
he referred to the interruption in the knowledge of God  
in Israel.

“Without instruction”  
designates that on account of this negative situation  
we lack clarity  
concerning the reasons for the Torah’s commandments  
and its mysteries.

Just as it is with the words of Torah and Scripture,  
so is it with the words of our sages of blessed memory,  
who expounded upon this wisdom  
in their homiletic compendia and narratives  
in the form of parables and ciphers,  
so as to hide these matters and conceal them.  
They scattered one here and one there,

so as to hide their place.  
When encountering them,  
a person does not sense their inner meaning  
but instead takes them at their face value.  
He does not contemplate  
the inner dimensions of their details,  
pays no heed,  
lacks the knowledge or insight to say:  
“How is it possible for our sages to have written such  
things,  
to have put them into writing in a book,  
unless a delightful treasure is hidden and concealed  
within them?”

So have I seen again and again  
over the course of many years.  
Yet I kept my silence,  
placing hand to mouth  
until I reached my fifth rung<sup>10</sup>  
and saw that the days of my life were setting before me,  
that old age was rapidly approaching.  
Therefore, I pressed forward to interpret  
one of Scripture’s twenty-four books,  
encompassing every delight,  
bespeaking matters weighty,  
mysteries and secrets whose memory was lost  
to Scripture’s interpreters,  
neglecting its perdurance and splendor:  
that is the Song of Songs.

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<sup>10</sup> Probably his fiftieth year.

In accord with my strength,  
I have interpreted it as I have received from our rabbis.  
I have crowned it with the meanings of the command-  
ments  
and composed it in accord with the mysteries of  
creation.<sup>11</sup>

I have observed  
that concerning the Song of Songs  
there are three classes of individuals  
with three distinct sets of opinions.  
The first group,  
possessing neither understanding nor insight,  
has left the world scattered with corpses.  
They contend that its words are those of sexual desire,  
seductive enchantment and falsehood,  
vanity lacking all value.  
Let their mouths be stuffed!  
Their eyes blinded!  
For if their words were true,  
it would not have been composed among the works of  
Scripture  
nor counted among them.

The second group  
views it as an allegory of the love of the Creator,  
the God of the entire world,  
for the splendor of Israel,  
His special treasure and unique inheritance,

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<sup>11</sup> Referring to the two major excurses within the text.

comparable to the desire of the lover for his beloved,  
of a man for his wife.  
They have established their words,  
suggested their interpretations,  
in accord with this allegory.

The third group,  
those who receive *shekhinah*,  
who possess a portion in God's Torah  
and remember it well,  
the true wise men of Israel  
who have revealed its secrets  
and hidden mysteries,  
who have brought forth its occult depths  
through wisdom's path and knowledge,  
have interpreted the entire text  
with that pithy principle  
enunciated by our sages in the tractate on Oaths:  
"Every Solomon mentioned in the Song of Songs is  
holy,<sup>12</sup>  
referring to Him who is the possessor of peace,  
save one:  
'I have my own vineyard: You may have the thousand  
O Solomon . . . ' [Cant. 8:12]."<sup>13</sup>  
Our sages state further in Sanhedrin,

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<sup>12</sup> I.e., a name of God.

<sup>13</sup> b. *Shavu'ot* 35b.

the chapter called "Portion".<sup>14</sup>  
"Anyone who recites a verse of the Song of Songs  
treating it as a mere song,  
brings evil into the world."<sup>15</sup>  
In the tractate Hands  
R. Akiva states  
that "the entire world's value  
can not be compared to the day  
upon which the Song of Songs was given to Israel.  
For while all of the Writings are holy,  
the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."<sup>16</sup>  
I have therefore directed my attention  
and proposed in my mind and thoughts  
to reveal in my commentary that true principle  
which our sages have transmitted through allusion.  
I have established it upon the pillars of their words,  
supported it upon the pedestals of their exegesis,  
and the wise will understand.

However, I must commence with three fundamental principles, in order to instruct you and provide your understanding with illumination.

The first principle serves to inform you that Solomon wrote this book in his old age,<sup>17</sup> inspired by the holy

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<sup>14</sup> The final chapter of the Talmudic tractate Sanhedrin.

<sup>15</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 101a.

<sup>16</sup> m. *Yadayim* 3:5.

<sup>17</sup> Following the view of R. Hiyya the Great in *Cant. Rabbah*. 1:10.

spirit. He referred to God's name as Solomon, like his own name. For we have found God designated as "Peace," as in Judges 6:24: "Gideon built an altar there and called it "the Lord of Peace." The name possesses two usages, one revealed, the second esoteric.<sup>18</sup> Through it Solomon glimpsed all that would occur in the future with regard to the construction of the Temples and Israel's exiles. He concealed the mention of the exile in an allusive manner for it was not to be mentioned in poetic language. His first words contained hidden within them wondrous songs, and an awesome righteousness,<sup>19</sup> making mention of the construction of God's throne, its appearance, height, work, and shape and the number of steps [*ma'alot*] which it possessed. He made mention of all of the events which would befall Israel from the Exodus, at which time they attained the appellation of God's people. For God's name is united with His people until the seventh millennium, the day which is entirely Shabbat and rest eternal. At the conclusion he concealed, indeed sealed, the work with an allusion to the exile's end and the fact that Israel would hold fast to their Torah and stand firm in faith in every location, even when suffering from intensified destruction and evil decrees.

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<sup>18</sup> Designating God as Solomon (*Shelomo=Shalom*) refers especially to *tiferet*, the sixth of the ten *sefirot*, the central "male" element of the Godhead, the aspect of divinity understood by the kabbalists as the bridegroom of the Song of Songs.

<sup>19</sup> "Righteousness" for the kabbalist can be a designation of *shekhinah*, who is also God's throne. See Prov. 25:5, etc. The passage here is obscure.

Solomon called it the Song of Songs, a song composed in the form of an allegorical parable replete with inner meaning. A person must thus interpret the song, establishing upon its foundations. But he must understand that it is filled with many elements provided for the sake of the narrational continuity of the allegory and the context of its imagery, rather than for any other purpose or function. For example, let me quote one verse from this book. It states: “Let him kiss me with the kisses . . .” [Cant. 1:2]. The kiss symbolizes the soul’s adhesion to God, as we will explain. The verse further states “the kisses of his mouth.” There is no additional meaning here. But having analogized the soul’s adhesion to God with a kiss, the verse is constrained to state “the kisses of his mouth” in order to tie the allegorical figure to its context. Thus one of the wise men of the generation has already written. Know that there are parables in this work whose details should in no manner undergo exegesis, such as: “the buds appear in the land, the time of pruning has come, the song of the turtledove is heard in our land” [Cant. 2:12]. We are not to minutely examine such and similar texts. Rather, we are simply to interpret it as an allegorical figure referring to the efflorescence of the coming days of release, while the winter rains refer to departing days of exile. Similarly: “Your belly is a heap of wheat” [Cant. 7:3–4]; and “Your breasts are like twin gazelles” [Cant. 4:5]. Neither through the exercise of rational nor traditional means of exegesis should you seek out their detailed meaning, for you will mire your mind in a multitude of words, vanities, and obstacles galore: “Hear this and accept it” [Job 5:27].

The second principle serves to inform you with words truly reliable that this text possesses words whose meaning is not revealed by any book, yet which serve as the foundation of its allegory and edifice. Among them are those whose meaning we have received from tradition; others have been found scattered in the homiletic dicta and exegetic texts of our sages, deep wells in which no drop of water is wasted. All of their words possess an inner heart free of an obstructive husk.

We have been taught by tradition that the following phrases refer to divine Wisdom:<sup>20</sup> “of wood from Lebanon” [Cant. 3:9], “the scent of Lebanon” [Cant. 4:11], “Come with me from Lebanon” [Cant. 4:8], “flowing streams from Lebanon” [Cant. 4:15]. This too was the intention of our sages when they interpreted “of wood from Lebanon” [Cant. 3:9] as referring to the counsel of Torah, which is refined [*ha-melubbenet*] in its words. The Aramaic translation also took this tact “From this goodly mountain and Lebanon” as “that goodly mountain and sanctuary” [Deut. 3:25].

We have further received from tradition that “your love is more delightful than wine” [Cant. 1:2] and “I will let you drink of the spiced wine” [Cant. 8:2] also symbolize divine Wisdom. So too, we have discovered that the number seventy designates the seventy divine names emanated from Wisdom. For Wisdom’s numerical equivalent is seventy-three; the meaning of the remaining three

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<sup>20</sup> *Hokhmah*, the second of the ten *sefirot*.

is well-established.<sup>21</sup> All that which we have mentioned is support and aid for this matter in addition to what has been received from tradition. Similarly, the terminology of “perfume” or “spice” as in “all choice perfumes” [Cant. 4:14], “to the bed of spices” [Cant. 6:2], “than any spice” [Cant. 4:10], “that its perfume might spread” [Cant. 4:16], and “to the mountain of spices” [Cant. 8:14] figure Wisdom. For it constitutes the beginning of being; from the point of Wisdom commences the propagation and expansion of scent.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, tradition imparts that the following figure the glory of the *shekhinah*: “like the apple among the forest’s trees” [Cant. 2:3]; “your breath is like apples’ fragrance” [Cant. 7:9]; “refresh me with apples” [Cant. 2:5]; and “under the apple tree I aroused you” [Cant. 8:5]. This figure derives from the change of the apple’s cover from green to red to white, like the appearance of the rainbow within the cloud.<sup>23</sup> The apple also figures the two cherubim, as it states in the tractate *Shabbat*: “‘Like the scent of a field blessed by God’ [Gen. 27:27]. R. Yehudah states in the name of Rav: ‘Like the scent of a field of apple trees.’”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Obscure. He may be referring to a tripartite division of *keter*, the first *sefirah*, related to a notion of three primal flashes of light (*tzahtzehot*) that precede the *sefirot*.

<sup>22</sup> Reah or scent is a metaphoric figure for the vivifying outflow of emanational energy, wafting forth from *hokhmah* through the sefirotic world.

<sup>23</sup> Ezek. 1:28.

<sup>24</sup> b. *Ta’anit* 29b.

“The shepherd among the lilies” [Cant. 6:3], “hedged about by lilies” [Cant. 7:3], “a lily of the valleys” [Cant. 2:1], and “to gather lilies” [Cant. 6:2] refer to that plant known as “lidi,” which possesses six leaves and figures the six supernal boundaries.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, “to browse in the gardens” [Cant. 6:2], “who lingers in the garden” [Cant. 8:13], “the garden spring” [Cant. 4:15], and “a garden locked” [Cant. 4:12] refer to the *shekhinah*, as we will explain further on.

The third principle comes to inform you briefly concerning the principles of Kabbalah inherent in these verses which serve as the pillar upon which all things rely, the peg upon which they hang, so that the interpretation of this book might be absorbed like water, directing your mind in the proper path.

The wise man stated in an allegorical parable:<sup>26</sup>

There is a mine for silver,  
And a place where gold is refined,  
Iron is taken out of the earth,  
And copper smelted from the rock [Job 28:1–2].

He mentions the four metals smelted from the rock, corresponding to the four types of elements as manifest in a human: white, red, green, and black biles. Similarly, every living thing, whether sentient or non-sentient, draws its life from the primary spiritual principles which

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<sup>25</sup> The *sefirot* from *hesed* to *yesod*.

<sup>26</sup> From here through the end of the introduction R. Ezra is explicating Job 28, which he employs to introduce sefirotic discourse.

exist among the ten *sefirot*. These are the primal progenitors of all generated things. When the verse enumerates the four terrestrial elements: silver, gold, iron, and copper, it is alluding to the four primary elements, informing us that they possess a place of origin.<sup>27</sup>

The verse furthermore explicates and designates the source of their origin: “He sets bounds for darkness” [Job 28:3]. It is common knowledge that darkness designates absolute nullity.<sup>28</sup> Under no circumstances can nullity be described with the terminology of formation [*yetzirah*] but rather that of creation [*beriah*]. In this context creation designates the manner in which God differentiated another principle and rung of emanation from darkness, which in itself lacks boundary or end. In stating “He sets bounds for darkness,” the intention is that God set a boundary to darkness, infixing within it border and limit. “To every limit man probes” [Job 28:3]. The possibility of speculative analysis inheres within each and every quality and being existing by the creative power of that nullity. That is to say, after these forces were actualized from their potential state, He made them into qualities and instruments that are subject to measure and hence to inquiry. For this reason Scripture speaks of darkness in terms of creation, and the light which existed within the creative capacity of darkness in terms of formation, as it

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<sup>27</sup> Silver is *hesed*; gold is *din*; copper is *tiferet*; and iron is *malkhut*.

<sup>28</sup> *Afisah* or nullity designates the highest *sefirah*, usually described in negative terms. Here that most primordial seed of existence is not clearly separated from *Eyn Sof*, the primordial boundless “darkness” of the unknown and unknowable God.

says: “He forms light and creates darkness” [Isa. 48:7]. This is also the meaning of: “He draws mysteries out of the darkness, and brings obscurities into light” [Job 12:22]. Nullity is designated as darkness and obscurity. Inherent within its creative power were light and other entities. This is further the meaning of: “rocks in deepest darkness” [Job 28:3]. Understand this, for it comprises a fundamental principle.

The verse further states: “A stream sprang forth from a dwelling-place, forgotten by wayfarers, destitute of men, far removed” [Job 28:4]. That is to say, the source of the channel watering all things was hidden and sealed. The figure of the stream refers to the path of Transcendent Wisdom. There was therefore neither modality nor place to water Lebanon’s trees or its planted cedars. But, Scripture says, “a stream sprang forth” from the place from which it was appropriate to flow. Due to the extraordinary mysteriousness of that place from which the stream flowed, it was parabolically and with poetic richness described as being “forgotten by wayfarers, destitute of men, far removed” [Job 28:4].

The text further states: “Earth, out of which food grows, is changed below as if into fire. Its rocks are a source of sapphires; it contains gold dust too” [Job 28:5–6]. That locus which is the origin of existence, the awakening of desire, is designated as the “earth.”<sup>29</sup> Providing sustenance for all things, it is the source of life, supplying the needs of the upper and lower worlds. “[It]

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<sup>29</sup> In the sense of a divine “ground of being.” The passage refers to *keter*, the primal will of God.

is changed below as if into fire”: the figure refers to its wondrous illumination and pure light, transcending all likeness and comparison.<sup>30</sup>

“Its rocks are a source of sapphires”: the quarry of the holy gems, the twenty-two primordial letters, each and every one an object of value, transformed into a creative vessel. From them holiness draws nigh, a tower of might is constructed and quarried, “to which the righteous man runs and is safe” [Prov. 18:10].

“No bird of prey knows the path to it, the falcon’s eye has not gazed upon it” [Job 28:7]. Wisdom’s thirty-two pathways are designated as a “path,” for they were previously hidden and sealed, unknown to the ministering angels. For “the falcon’s eye has not gazed upon it” until the time of favor.

“Man sets his hand against the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots” [Job 28:9]. Wisdom is compared to a flinty rock on account of the paths hidden within it, the depth of Wisdom being analogized to an entity hidden in a hard and difficult place, whose foundation must be overturned.

“He carves out channels through rock; His eyes behold every precious thing” [Job 28:10]. Channels [*ye’orim*] refers to the totality of all of the sefirotic existences [*havayot*] and is derived from “light” [*or*] as in “the waters [=lights] lift up their voices [Ps. 93:3].<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The light flowing forth from *keter*, the channel of infinite divine energy.

<sup>31</sup> Here he calls upon an ancient connection between the Hebrew and Aramaic words for “light” and “water.”

These primordial existences are implied by the term “water” in the Biblical account of creation, as it is written: “And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters” [Gen. 1:2]. After all of these channels flowed forth, “his eyes beheld every precious thing.”

Among the phenomena emanated on the first day were ten entities commingled one with the other: heaven and earth; primordial chaos;<sup>32</sup> light and darkness; wind and water; and the quality of day and the quality of night.<sup>33</sup> This is the intent of “He dams up the sources of the streams” [Job 28:11]. Since these ten entities were considered as one, the cosmos being in the inchoate state of water intermixed with water, God dammed those watery channels, separating the waters with the command: “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water . . .” [Gen 1:6]. Thus the verse continues, “from its hiddenness He brought forth light.” The hiddenness of transcendent Wisdom brought forth light.

“Whence [*me-ayin*] can Wisdom be found?” [Job 28:12]. This Wisdom itself derives from Nought [*ayin*], the primordial Nought, no mortal knowing its value [*’erkah*] which here means its order and array. That is to say, no one knows how to order the primal existences that are situated within her or how to know its characteristics. As it is written: “Who like Me can announce, can foretell it—and match Me thereby? Even as I told the future to an ancient people . . .” [Isa. 44:7]. “[For

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<sup>32</sup> Primordial chaos is twofold: *tohu va-vohu*.

<sup>33</sup> v. *Hagigah* 12a. The kabbalists associate this list with the ten *sefirot*.

Wisdom] can not be found in the land of the living” [Job 28:13]. Even the angels do not know it. Thus the text states figuratively: “The deep says: ‘It is not in me.’ The sea says: ‘I do not have it’” [Job 28:14]. Similarly we find “But whence does wisdom come?” [Job 28:20] and “it is hidden from the eyes of all of the living” [Job 28:21], from them whose lives are eternal. “Concealed from all the fowl of heaven”—the ministering angels.

“*Abaddon* and death say” [Job 28:22]—this is primal void, whence comes the emanation of all of the existences. “God understands its way” [Job 28:23]—by meditating upon it. It traced and emanated the four primal elements, these being “For He sees to the ends of the earth, observes all that is beneath the heavens, when he fixed the weight of the winds, set the measure of the waters” [Job 28:24].

“Then He saw and gauged it” [Job 28:27]—gazing upon Purity of Thought [*keter*], just as a man considering an enterprise first examines it within his heart and then begins to undertake it. Thus our sages say: “the thought of the righteous preceded all.”<sup>34</sup> In accord with the images within, it traced the totality which emanated from it. “He saw it and gaged it”: the three primal “books”—Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge. “He measured it”—the existences were not arrayed in accord with the order of the sefirotic structure. Rather God, be He praised, brought the existences into being, arrayed them in order, transformed them into a structure, after

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<sup>34</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 1:5. The first *sefirah* already includes and implies the last, associated with righteousness.

combining, measuring, and transposing the twenty-two letters, binding each and every one to its colleague, so that they paralleled one another. “And He probed it”: He affixed boundary to the sefirotic qualities, rendered them accessible to probing, although they in principle possessed no boundary from their beginning.

“He said to man: “See, fear of the Lord is Wisdom” [Job 28:28]. For Wisdom [*hokhmah*] is the Holy One’s quality of goodness, all existing, going forth and being emanated from the luminescence of Wisdom and continually blessed through it without cessation. Because their origin is from it, it provides the essence of their sustenance. The remaining *sefirot* possess but one request, toward which the entirety of their desire is directed. That is to ascend and enter into the sacred sanctuary, to draw water from the honored fountains of Wisdom, as we are about to explain. Having provided you with these three introductory principles, I will explicate the text with the help of God.

[Text]

[1:1] **The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.**

**The Song of Songs:** The most pleasant of canticles, the choicest of songs; words of might recited by the Throne of Glory,<sup>35</sup> day to day expressing utterance,

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<sup>35</sup> Usually understood by Kabbalists as referring to *malkhut*, the tenth *sefirah*, the feminine-receptive aspect of the Godhead.

standing in prayer in good order arrayed, its speech lucid, in all things well ordered and sure.

**Which is Solomon's:** This is a name designating the Holy One, blessed be He. As it is written: "Gideon built there an altar to the Lord and called it 'the Lord of peace'" [Judges 6:24]. This is the meaning of the statement of our Sages of blessed memory: "The song which the Holy One blessed be He recites daily."<sup>36</sup>

**[1:2] Oh, let him kiss me the kisses of his mouth;  
for your love is more delightful than wine.**

**Oh let him kiss me:** These are the Glory's<sup>37</sup> words, full of longing, desiring to make its ascent, to adhere to the light of the supernal luminescence to which nothing else is like. It ascends in thought and idea and thus speaks in third person. The kiss symbolizes the joy attained by the soul in its adhesion to the source of life and the additional infusion of the holy spirit.<sup>38</sup> Thus the verse specifies "kisses." For each and every sefirotic power<sup>39</sup> receives consciousness and a superabundance

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<sup>36</sup> Canticles Rabbah 6:12. The Song is thus sung by *tiferet* and *malkhut*, bridegroom and bride within the Godhead.

<sup>37</sup> The Glory is *tiferet*, the masculine pole of creative energy in the realm of divine emanation.

<sup>38</sup> Source of life (*mekor ha-hayyim*) and holy spirit (*ruah ha-kodesh*) generally symbolize *hokhmah* in Geronan sources.

<sup>39</sup> Literally *sibah* or cause.

from that sweet light and pure refulgence. When it speaks to the Glory, gateway to the entities [i.e., the *sefirot*], it speaks in third person.

**For your love is better [tovim] than wine:** This emanated light expands over me because it comes from You, that is to say, it is derived from “wine,” from divine Wisdom called “I,” the rung of supernal luminescence. All desire and will is to ascend and adhere to Wisdom.

**For your love is better [tovim] than wine:** The phrase “is better” [tovim] refers to the outpouring and amplification of that clear light, which divides and shines in all directions.<sup>40</sup> As it says: “when Aaron lights [behetivo] the lamps” [Exod. 30:8]—which the Aramaic translation renders as “kindles.” Such also is the meaning of “God saw that the light was good” [Gen. 1:4].<sup>41</sup>

**[1:3] Your oils are of fine aroma;  
your name is like oil poured forth.  
Therefore the maidens love you.**

**Your oils are of fine aroma:** He calls the effulgent flow from the Glory, the gateway to the entities, “aroma.” From there it increases and flows down into the seventy branches that surround the central column. Counting it, there are seventy-one. Because of this, the

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<sup>40</sup> The word *tovim* is plural: your love is an improvement upon the wine of *hokhmah*, as it flows in multiple directions.

<sup>41</sup> “Goodness” is the ongoing flow of light from lamp to lamp, the ceaseless flow of divine life, through the *sefirot* and into the world.

text says: “from the kisses of his mouth”: from that very light.<sup>42</sup>

**Your name is like oil poured forth:** Your name is like fine oil, poured from one vessel into another. The seventy names are emanated from the seven *sefirot*. *tiferet* and the Crown<sup>43</sup> are for Israel, the singular people, for Israel nurse from the trunk of the tree, *tiferet* and Crown, all joined as one. But its aroma travels a great distance. So too Your name increases and is poured forth as pure light to *shekhinah*, which is contained and sealed into all.<sup>44</sup> Counting her they are seventy-two. This is the meaning of “therefore the maidens love you.”

**[1:4] Draw me after you, let us run!  
The king has brought me to his chambers.  
Let us delight and rejoice in your love,  
Savoring it more than wine—  
They love you sincerely!**

**Draw me after you:** The Glory says: “May it be your will that I might ascend towards you.” **Let us run:** When

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<sup>42</sup> Each of the branches is “kissed” or nourished directly from His mouth, from *tiferet* or the central column.

<sup>43</sup> The term here is ‘atarah, referring to *malkhut*, the last of the ten *sefirot*.

<sup>44</sup> It would seem that a distinction is made here between ‘atarah, the tenth sefirah, and *shekhinah*, which is the indwelling presence of God in the world, as in the older rabbinic sources. The passage is however difficult.

the middle column [the Glory] ascends, all of the branches ascend with it. When it receives a superabundance of blessing, all of them are blessed, as I will explain further on.

He calls forth, saying: **The king has brought me to his chambers.** His desire is that I should ascend and enter his chambers by means of his paths whose number is thirty-two. And upon my entrance: **We will delight and rejoice.** This joy consists of the additional infusion of the holy spirit into the seventy-two names of the Holy One, blessed be He.

**We will savor it** [*nazkirah*]: *Nazkirah* is derived from *azkarah*,<sup>45</sup> for the soul's delight is derived from the pleasure of scent.

**The upright** [*meisharim*] **love you**: By the upright Solomon refers to the simple infants and sucklings lacking complexity [*harkavah*], as it says: "it is You who have established the upright" [Ps. 99:4]. **Love you**: The goal of their desire and intention is to ascend and adhere to the place from which they draw nourishment.<sup>46</sup> Our sages have accordingly instituted liturgical blessings, the recitation of the Sanctus, and the affirmation of divine unity so as to draw forth and emanate the energies of the Fathers [*hesed, gevurah, tiferet*] to the other *sefirot*, their children. With respect to this matter and in accord with the interpretation which I have provided here, our Sages

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<sup>45</sup> The memorial offering of flour and frankincense providing a *reah nih oah*, a "pleasing odor to the Lord."

<sup>46</sup> *Mekom yenikatam*: literally "the place from which they nurse."

have stated in the Midrash to Canticles: “‘The King has brought me to his chambers’: These are the chambers of the Garden of Eden.”

**[1:5] I am dark, but comely,  
O daughters of Jerusalem—  
Like the tents of Kedar,  
Like the pavilions of Solomon.**

**[1:6] Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,  
Because the sun has gazed upon me.  
My mother’s sons quarreled with me,  
They made me guard the vineyards;  
My own vineyard I did not guard.**

These are the *shekhinah*’s words, who descended with our father Jacob to Egypt, as it is written: “I will descend with you to Egypt” [Gen. 46:4]. She participated in Israel’s exile, as our sages state: “When they were exiled to Egypt, the Presence was with them, as it states: ‘Was I not exiled with you with the house of your fathers when you were in Egypt?’ [I Sam. 2:27].”<sup>47</sup> She complains and thunders forth about her being in exile, traveling darkened with the angelic forces apportioned to the world’s nations. She says, **I am dark**: Swarthy from exile. If I am not lovely **like the pavilions of Solomon**: The name of the Holy One, blessed be He,<sup>48</sup> like the essence of the heavens in its purity. And so it says: “He

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<sup>47</sup> In Tractate Megillah 29a.

<sup>48</sup> “Solomon” here refers to God, specifically to *tiferet*.

stretches the heavens like a tent” [Ps. 104:2].<sup>49</sup>

**Do not stare at me:** Do not despise me because I am swarthy, **because the sun has gazed upon me**, because I am situated amongst my children who are enslaved, at hard labor, performing all of their work in the field. **My mother’s sons:** The similitude refers to the holy spirit, from which all things are emanated; that is to say the remaining angelic princes appointed as custodians over each and every nation.

**Quarreled with me:** They raged against me and banished me from my place, as our sages say: “No nation falls until his angelic prince is first cast down. As it says: ‘On that day, the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on the earth’ [Isa. 24:21]; and: ‘How are you fallen from heaven, O Shining One, son of Dawn! How are you felled to earth, O vanquisher of nations!’ [Isa. 14:12]; and says further: ‘For My sword shall be seen in the sky; Lo, it shall come down upon Edom’ [Isa. 34:5].”<sup>50</sup>

**They made me guard the vineyards:** I am belabored in fulfilling the needs of the nations and ensuring their preservation. I have no leisure to watch over My people, for they are not in their land and I accompany them in their exile. The nation is designated a vineyard, for just as a vineyard requires labor, pruning, and watering, so too does a people. Everything existing within the world

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<sup>49</sup> The rest of the sefirotic world is pure and lovely; only *shekhinah* is “darkened” because of her involvement with the lower world.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Mekhilta Shirta* 2.

is in need of the primary forces for their growth and blossoming.

[1:7] **Tell me, whom I love so well;  
Where do you pasture your sheep?  
Where do you rest them at noon?  
Let me not be like one who strays  
Beside the flocks of your fellows.**

**Tell me:** Show me your place so that I might go there; so that you might dwell with me as before; so that my children might return as in ancient days.

**Where do you pasture your sheep?:** Pasturing refers to the satisfaction derived from the joy of emanation and its superabundance. Our sages designated this as “eating.” As they stated in *Midrash Shemot Rabbah*: “They saw God” [Exod. 24:11], their eyes drew their nourishment from the *shekhinah*. R. Yohanan states that this was true eating. As it says: “In the King’s countenance resides life” [Prov. 16:15].<sup>51</sup>

**Where do you rest them at noon?:** The parable refers to the removal of the Glory and its ascension to highest heights of heaven.

**Let me not be as one who strays beside the flocks of your fellows!:** For how long will you desire that I be intermingled among the other nations, who are the flocks of your fellows? The text states “beside” [*al*—literally “over”] because the Central Pillar is exalted over all.

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<sup>51</sup> Compare *Vayikra Rabbah* 20:10.

**[1:8] If you do not know, O fairest of women,  
Go follow the tracks of the sheep,  
And graze your kids  
By the shepherds' tents.**

The Glory replies: **If you do not know, O fairest of women** the cause of my removal and the delay of the End and desire to return with your children to your cities and to your place, **go follow the tracks of the sheep**—direct your children with goodly instruction—in rectitude, fear of heaven, and propriety, so that they might hold fast to My service and faith and follow the practice of the patriarchs and shepherds rather than the nations' laws, which are vain and deceitful. So Ezekiel expounds: “Cast away, every one of you, the detestable things that you are drawn to, and do not defile yourselves with the fetishes of Egypt. I am the Lord your God . . .” [20:7]. “Walk in My statutes . . .” [20:19]. Daniel promised that throughout this lengthy period of exile, Israel would observe Torah and hold fast to their faith, as it is written: “The enlightened will shine like the radiance of the firmament and those who lead the multitudes to righteousness will be like the stars forever” [Dan. 12:3].

**[1:9] I have likened you, my darling,  
To a mare in Pharaoh's chariots.**

**To a mare:** These are the words of the Glory. The figure refers to Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel, the Glory and the Presence of Its might accompanying them, with his chariots and cavalry.

**I have likened you, my darling:** Israel gazed at the *shekhinah* just like an individual sees the image of [*ha-medammeh le-*]<sup>52</sup> his companion and says: “It’s so and so!” So did Israel gaze upon the *shekhinah*, point towards her and say: “This is my God and I will glorify Him!” [Isa. 15:2].

**[1:10] Your cheeks are comely with plaited wreaths. . . .**

The figure is that of the *shekhinah* leaving exile and entering the bridal chamber. Wreaths and strings of pearls are women’s jewelry, the ornaments of a bride.

**[1:11] We will add wreaths of gold  
to your points<sup>53</sup> of silver.**

The parable conveys that both written and oral Torah are conveyed by the *shekhinah*. The two are compared to gold and silver: “I prefer the teaching You proclaimed to thousands of gold and silver pieces” [Ps. 119:72]. Similarly, they are compared to wine and milk, and honey and

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<sup>52</sup> The phrase would alternatively be rendered: “imagines.”

<sup>53</sup> Points or studs (*nekudot*). The term is used as well to designate the vowel signs that are placed above and below the consonants of the Hebrew alphabet and look very much like points (*nekudot*). R. Ezra will construct an elaborate exegetic pun upon the multiple meanings of the term in which the studs (*nekudot*) of silver—the teachings of written Torah—will serve as the animating force of the wreaths of gold—oral Torah—just as the vowels (*nekudot*) transform inert consonants into pliable words and living discourse.

milk, as in “All who are thirsty, come for water . . . buy . . . wine and milk without cost” [Isa. 55:1]. And “Sweetness drops from your lips o bride; honey and milk are under your tongue” [Song of Songs 4:11]. That is to say that they are all the image and appearance: water from wind and fire from water. Because redness is closer to us, the verse gives precedence to the red. But the Holy One gives precedence to the white, as it says: “Mine is silver and mine is gold” [Hag. 2:8].<sup>54</sup>

**To your points of silver:** Oral Torah is emanated from the written and it sustains her, just as the spirit upholds the body. Thus written Torah has been compared to points [*nekudot*], since the vowels [*nekudot*] function among the consonants like the spirit in the body, as our sages say.<sup>55</sup> Both Torahs, oral and written, were given through the *shekhinah* as they state in the Midrash to Psalms, “The Lord gives a command; the women who bring the news are a great host” [Ps. 68:12].<sup>56</sup> From here

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<sup>54</sup> “Wine,” “red,” and “gold” are symbols of the left side, while “white,” “milk,” and “silver” symbolize the right. Isa. 55:1, referring to human access, mentions wine before milk. The Haggai verse, referring to God, reverses the symbolic order: God prefers silver (*hesed*) to gold (*din*).

<sup>55</sup> See Ecclesiastes Rabbah 8:11, where R. Haninah interprets Zach. 12:1 “God created [*yatzar*] humanity’s spirit within it” as meaning that the spirit has been tied or bound up within the body in order to animate. See Chavel (cited on page 10 of the editor’s note above), note 39 *ad locum*.

<sup>56</sup> Concerning this verse, the Midrash states: “As for the Holy One, blessed be He, His name and might, when He declaims in enunciated

it is clear that the innermost voice was not differentiated and rendered audible until it reached the end of the chain of emanation, the tenth *sefirah*.

Of this Scripture says: “They dance about, dance about; the beautiful one of the house divides the spoils” [Ps. 86:13].

Now you have to know that which is taught in the Tractate *Berakhot*<sup>57</sup>: “Whoever partakes of a wedding-feast and does not make the bridegroom rejoice transgresses five ‘voices,’ as Scripture says: ‘The voice of gladness, the voice of joy, the voice of bridegroom and the voice of bride, a voice saying “Praise to the Lord”’ [Jer. 33:11], and so forth. And if one does give joy to the bridegroom, what is his reward? He attains Torah, which was given with five ‘voices,’ as its says: ‘It was morning on the third day and there were thunderings<sup>58</sup> . . . and the sound of the shofar . . .’ [Exod. 19:16]. ‘There was the sound of the shofar . . . and God responded in thunder’ [Exod. 19:19].” Is it true that there are five? Does it not

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speech, the sound is divided into seven voices.” Divine speech creates the cosmogenerative septet ranging from *hesed* to the *shekhinah*. However, it only becomes audible, giving rise to the differentiated cosmos and producing prophetic discourse through the aegis of the *shekhinah*, the final rung in the chain of divine being.

<sup>57</sup> b. *Berakhot* 6b.

<sup>58</sup> The term for “thunder” and “sound” throughout this passage is *kol*, the same as “voice” in the Jeremiah passage. The thunderbolts are the “voice” of God as Torah is given. From the reading of the Jeremiah passage it appears that the five “voices” are the five lower *sefirot* from *tiferet* to *malkhut*, or from bridegroom to bride.

also say: “And all the people saw the thunderbolts?” [Exod. 20:18].<sup>59</sup> Those had already occurred previously.

Here they spoke of five voices. But we have also noted seven voices, those mentioned by King David in the Psalm [29]: “Render unto the Lord, O sons of gods!” Our sages have said that the divine Word was divided into seven voices.<sup>60</sup>

In the *Mekhilta* [to Exod. 15:26] it says: “If you surely listen to the voice of the Lord your God.” These are the ten commandments, given from mouth to mouth by ten voices.

Now you attune your ear and listen to my words, so that the words of the sages be fulfilled. That which Moses and all Israel attained on that occasion, when they saw eye to eye, was only five voices, no more. That is why they forced Rabbi Helbo to admit that “And all the people saw the thunderbolts” referred to previously heard voices. These five are the totality. Moses asked to attain more, but was not answered. These five voices contain all seven extensions of space.<sup>61</sup> From them are derived the seventy divine names that are appointed over the seventy nations. Together with the innermost voice they comprise seventy-one. That innermost voice split [into seventy] as

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<sup>59</sup> This might mean there were six or seven, thus breaking the parallel of five (wedding shouts) to five (Torah-sounds). Sinai is frequently depicted in the Midrash as the marriage of God and Israel.

<sup>60</sup> *Shemot Rabbah* 28, end.

<sup>61</sup> North, east, south, west, up, down, and inward. These will be associated below with the seven lower *sefirot*.

it addressed the seventy nations. Every nation heard the Word, and that is the “great voice that did not cease” [Deut. 5:19]. All this is compared to a hammer, whose power is one but which fragments the rock into multiple pieces. So the totality of all is five voices, their specification is seven, except for the innermost voice, parallel to the singular nation. Of this it says: “A great voice that did not cease.” But the one who refers to ten voices holds fast to the highest total, that of the ten *sefirot*. All these lead in the same direction, having been “given by a single shepherd” [Eccles. 12:11].

**[1:12] While the king was on his couch,  
My nard gave forth its fragrance.**

When the Glory resided upon its throne, this being the revelation at Sinai, the *shekhinah* said: **My nard gave forth its fragrance**. Israel desired to view God eye to eye, stating: “It is our desire to see our King!” They received a positive answer, as it is written: “He said to Moses: ‘Ascend to God’” [Exod. 24:1]. And it says: “they gazed upon God” [Exod. 24:11].

**[1:13] My beloved to me is a bag of myrrh  
Lodged between my breasts.**

**[1:14] My beloved to me is a spray of henna blooms  
From the vineyards of Ein Gedi.**

**A bag of myrrh:** The forms existing occulted within the Glory are likened to a bag of myrrh. **A spray of henna blooms:** The forms which are revealed and rendered accessible. The Glory is similarly called the

bundle of life, because souls are bound and connected there. Thus they say in the Midrash to Canticles<sup>62</sup>: “‘Within it was decked with love’—these are the souls of the righteous which are present with God on high.” Three penetrated [the divine realms], each deeper than the other. “Moses approached the deep darkness” [Exod. 20:9]. The Targum<sup>63</sup> interprets this as: “towards the dense cloud.” That is, he perceived divine Will, Wisdom and Understanding, but not through the Speculum. Thus Righteousness and Justice are further inward,<sup>64</sup> as it is written: “Righteousness and justice are the base of Your throne” [Ps. 89:16]. Further beyond are the souls of the righteous, as it says: “In his hands is the soul of every living thing” [Job 12:10] and “May the soul of my lord be bound up in the bond of life” [I Sam. 25:29].<sup>65</sup>

And it says: **My beloved to me** because he exists near to her and for her sake.

**From the vineyards of Ein Gedi:** in that place the henna is of the finest quality.

**[1:15] Ah, you are fair, my darling,  
Ah, you are fair,  
With your dove-like eyes!**

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<sup>62</sup> Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Zuta 3:10.

<sup>63</sup> Targum Onkelos *ad locum*.

<sup>64</sup> Probably *malkhut* and *yesod*. See *R. Azriel: Perush ha-Aggadot*, ed. Tishby (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1945), index of symbols.

<sup>65</sup> The “hand” is higher than the “throne.”

**Ah, you are fair:** This bespeaks the construction of the tabernacle and the entrance into the bridal chamber, as it is written: “It was the day on which Moses completed [*k’lot*] the tabernacle” [Num. 7:1]. Concerning this our sages said: “The text spells ‘completed’ [*k’lot*] as though comparable to the day upon which the bride [*kalah*] enters the bridal chamber.”<sup>66</sup> The parable’s meaning points to the holy of holies, that is the *shekhinah*.

**[1:17] Cedars are the beams of our house,  
Cypresses the rafters.**

**Cedars are the beams of our house:** The beams of the tabernacle were of acacia wood, cedar being a type of acacia. So it is written: “I will plant cedars in the wilderness, acacias and myrtles and oleasters” [Isa. 41:19].

**Cypresses the rafters:** So too were the tabernacle poles which ran from one extremity [of the sanctuary] to the other.<sup>67</sup> All this is a parable referring to union and intimate closeness: the time of love.

**[2:1] I am a rose of Sharon,  
A lily of the valleys.**

**[2:2] As a lily among the thorns,  
So is my darling among the maidens.**

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<sup>66</sup> Midrash Be-Midbar Rabbah 12:10.

<sup>67</sup> The poles and rafters of the tabernacle are depicted as the lines that flow between the various *sefirot*, the divine construct holding them all together.

**[2:3] Like an apple tree among trees of the forest,  
So is my beloved among the youths.  
In his shade is my delight,  
And his fruit is sweet to my mouth.**

**I am a rose of Sharon:** Our sages said: “Sharon designates song [*shirah*]. She sang to the One who created the world.”<sup>68</sup>

**As a lily among the thorns:** The lily is that plant known as the *lida* which possesses six leaves. Thus the *shekhinah* has six boundaries.

The Glory is likened to an apple which possesses multiple colors: green, red, and white. **Among the trees of the forest:** This passage is a figure referring to the Central Column, standing in the medial position. None of the trees can produce their own fruit by their own devices since all draw their nourishment [*yenikatam*] from there.

**In his shade is my delight:** My existence is through His power and causal agency and for His very sake.

**And his fruit is sweet to my mouth:** The fruit of the Holy One, blessed be He, are the souls, as it is written: “From me comes your fruit” [Hosea 4:9]. Also “Light is sown for the righteous” [Ps. 97:11] and “Sweet is the light” [Eccles. 11:7].

**[2:4] He brought me to the banquet room<sup>69</sup>  
And his banner of love was over me.**

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<sup>68</sup> Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Zuta 2:1.

<sup>69</sup> Lit. *beit ha-yayin*: house of wine, a symbol of *hokhmah*.

**He brought me to the banquet room:** A figure of the ascent of the Glory and the greatness of its joy and pleasure within the supernal light.

**And his banner of love was over me:** He arrayed the four tribal banners and the *shekhinah's* camp in the middle, just as He surrounded His throne with the four camps of angels. Michael stands to His right, for he is the angel of love and compassion, corresponding to Reuben, whose banner is situated in the south, who began his career with an act of compassion and rescue, as it says: "Reuben heard and saved him from their hands" [Gen. 37:21]. Uriel is positioned on the left, for he is appointed over justice and vengeance. He corresponds to the tribe of Dan, who produced Micah's statue and received Jeroboam's calf.<sup>70</sup> Gabriel stands before Him, corresponding to the kingdom of the house of Judah, whose banner was situated in the east. As it says: "For Judah triumphed over his brothers" [I Chron. 5:2]. Raphael is behind him, corresponding to Ephraim situated in the west, fulfilling the need for healing caused by the sin of Jeroboam.

This order corresponds to the world's four directions: the east, whence light enters the world; the west, in which lie the treasures of snow and hail and whence come coldness and warmth; the south, whence dews and rains of blessing come; and the north, from which darkness enters the world. Thus is the structure ordered: by day it faces to the east, ruling over command of the day.

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<sup>70</sup> The association of *din*, or the left side, with the demonic is strongly enunciated here.

But at night it faces west to pray; that is opposed to what we have said.<sup>71</sup> Just as the tribal banners are arrayed to symbolize the world to come and this world as we have explained, so too has the tabernacle been constructed according to the order of the upper world, the building of the holy of holies, where the *shekhinah* rests between the two cherubim. Corresponding to the intermediate angelic world, in which serve those angels whose authority is over the earth, is the tent of meeting, in which are situated the showbread table, the candelabrum and the golden altar, these being inner and spiritual vessels. The golden altar was not designated for wholly burnt offerings or sacrifices, but rather for the incense, which was a matter subtle and spiritual. Facing it was the candelabrum and the light from its six branches issuing as hammered work from its central branch, radiating light at the front of the lamp stand. Corresponding to the terrestrial world is the sacrificial altar, situated in the tabernacle court, upon which all of the sacrifices might be offered.

Similarly, three worlds exist within a human being: the world of speech corresponding to the head; that of the life-force from the navel and above; and the natural world from the navel and below, in which are situated multitudinous obstacles.

Thus Scripture states, **His banner of love was over me**, alluding to the camp of the *shekhinah* located in the midst of the four tribal ensigns, as it is written: “Then, midway between the divisions, the Tent of Meeting, the division of the Levites, shall move” [Num. 2:17].

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<sup>71</sup> Perhaps implying that darkness should come from the west (opposite to the east) rather than from the north.

And we have similarly found that the figures of the Tabernacle constitute a symbol of the Holy One, blessed be He, and of the world. So our sages have said: “R. Joshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi: ‘When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses “Make Me a sanctuary that I might dwell among you,” he was to erect four poles and stretch out the tabernacle upon them. This teaches that the Holy One showed him red fire, green fire, black fire, and white fire. He said to him: “follow the patterns . . . that are being shown to you on the mountain” [Exod. 25:40].’

“R. Berechyah said: ‘This can be likened in a parable to a king who had a wonderful garment made of pearls. He said to his retainer: “Make me another like this one.” The retainer said to him: “My lord king, can I really make one like it?” The king said: “I in accord with my glory, you in accord with your own material.” Similarly, our teacher Moses said to God: “Can I construct something like these?” God said: “In accord with their patterns, using blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen.”’

“Thus is the entire world included within the construction of the sanctuary. Concerning the world it is written: ‘God created the heavens and the earth’ [Gen. 1:1] and ‘He stretches the heavens out like a curtain’ [Ps. 104:2]. The Tabernacle contained goat skins for its tent. On the second day it is written: ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, separating water from water’ [Gen. 1:6]. Concerning the tabernacle it states: ‘the curtain shall serve as a partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies’ [Exod. 26:33]. On the third day of creation, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered into

one area . . .’ [Gen. 1:9]. Concerning the sanctuary: ‘You shall make a brass basin’ [Exod. 30:18]. On the fourth day: ‘Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the sky’ [Gen. 1:14] while in the tabernacle there was the candelabrum of pure gold. On the fifth day of creation: ‘. . . and birds that fly above the earth’ [Gen. 1:20] while in the Sanctuary: ‘Let there be cherubim with outstretched wings’ [Exod. 25:20]. Humanity was created on the sixth day. Concerning the sanctuary it states: ‘Bring forward Aaron your brother’ [Exod. 28:1]. On the seventh day: ‘The heaven and the earth were completed’ [Gen. 2:1]. Concerning the tabernacle: ‘Thus was completed all of the work of the Tabernacle . . .’ [Exod. 39:32]. Concerning the work of Creation, it is written: ‘God blessed them’ [Gen. 1:33] and concerning the construction of the tabernacle: ‘Moses blessed them . . .’ [Exod. 39:43]. On the seventh day it states: ‘On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing’ [Gen. 2:2], concerning the tabernacle: ‘On the day which Moses completed . . .’ [Num. 7:1]. On the seventh day: ‘God sanctified it’ [Gen. 2:3]; concerning the tabernacle: ‘Moses consecrated it . . .’ [Num. 7:1].”<sup>72</sup>

All of the above alludes to the fact that this world draws its life and is connected and adheres to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. So too the ark and its utensils are symbolic allusions. Above “seraphim stand” [Isa. 6:2]; below “acacia wood stands” [Exod. 26:16]. Above “He sits upon the cherubim” [Ps. 80:2]; below “cherubim of outstretched wing” [Exod. 37:9]. Above are

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<sup>72</sup> Midrash Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 1.

the holy wheels (of Ezekiel's vision); below "the structure of the wheels was like the structure of the wheel of the heavenly chariot-throne" [I Kings 7:33].

**[2:5] Sustain me with raisin cakes,  
Refresh me with apples,  
For I am faint with love.**

**Sustain me with raisin cakes:** A figure of great pleasure. Raisin cakes [*ashishot*] are those entities which are the foundations [*ashyot*] of the worlds above and below.

**Refresh me with apples:** With the two cherubim between whom I am situated, and from whom I receive blessing.

**For I am faint with love:** Faint with love from all of the joy of the heart and the weakness of the soul.

**[2:7] I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem,  
By the hosts [*tsevaot*] or by the hinds of the field:  
Do not wake or rouse  
Love until it please!**

**I adjure you:** She speaks to Israel: beware lest sin causes the *shekhinah* to depart.

**By the hosts:** Hosts [*tsevaot*]: by the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, for the Holy One's name is His hosts.

**By the hinds of the field:** The Presence of His might, as it says: "the voice of God causes hinds to calve" [Ps. 29:9].

**[2:8] Hark! My beloved!  
There he comes,  
Leaping over mountains,  
Bounding over hills.**

**Hark! My beloved!:** The words of the *shekhinah*. This was on the twentieth of Iyyar when the cloud arose from the tabernacle of the covenant.<sup>73</sup>

**Leaping over the mountains:** That is to say that the Glory lept from mountain to hill, God's ark being in the midst of the tent cloth.

**[2:9] My beloved is like a gazelle  
Or like a young stag.**

Thus it says: **My beloved is like a gazelle . . .** : I found no rest from all of the places to which he journeyed: the burning bush, Sinai, the tent of meeting, until he dwelt in the Temple in Jerusalem, by the western wall. As our sages say: "The Shechinah has never departed the western wall. As it says: 'There he stands behind our wall, gazing . . . ' [Cant. 2:9] from there watching over and observing humanity."<sup>74</sup>

**[2:10] My beloved spoke thus to me:**

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<sup>73</sup> See Numbers 10:11: "In the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month, the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle of the Covenant and the Israelites set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai."

<sup>74</sup> Exodus Rabbah 2:2.

**“Arise, my darling;  
My fair one, come away!”**

**Arise, my darling:** To move from her place and go before the congregation of Israel. And such is the meaning of “Let me see your face” [Cant. 2:14]. These verses are a parable concerning this, as our sages said: “The Lord God has returned with you from captivity and taken you back in love’ [Deut. 30:3]. The verse does not state ‘God will restore you from captivity’ but rather ‘God has returned.’”<sup>75</sup> This teaches that the *shekhinah* returned with Israel from exile. And so too: “I set my heart by the highway, the road by which you traveled” [Jer. 31:21]. The received text<sup>76</sup> is “the road by which I traveled.” So too where Micah [4:10] is read as “So now you must leave the city and dwell in the country,” the received text is “I will dwell in the country.”<sup>77</sup>

**[2:11] For now the winter is past:** A parable referring to the final fulfillment and the end of exile.

**[2:12] The blossoms have appeared in the land:** This refers to the nearness of the days of ease and the coming of the time of inheritance and rest.

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<sup>75</sup> b. *Megillah* 29a.

<sup>76</sup> The Masoretic text as written, without the note for proper reading preserved in the margin.

<sup>77</sup> All these readings hint at *shekhinah*'s participation in Israel's exile.

**[2:14] O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks:** Until now the *shekhinah* has dwelt with Israel in exile, as our sages said: “‘He sets the childless woman among her household as a happy mother of children’ [Ps. 113:9]. The community of Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘My children have made me to dwell, like a weasel, in ruined houses.’”<sup>78</sup>

**[2:15] Catch us the foxes**  
**The little foxes**  
**That ruin the vineyards—**  
**For our vineyard is in blossom.**

**Catch us the little foxes:** The parable refers to the spies, who were weak like foxes. They said: “‘However, the people who dwell in the land are powerful . . . the Amalekites dwell in the south country” [Num. 13:28].

**That ruin the vineyards:** The parable refers to the nations that profited through Israel’s arrival in the land and the construction of the Temple, as our Sages said: “‘All of the earth’s families shall be blessed through you’ [Gen. 12:3]—even the foreign families in the land are blessed only on account of Israel.”<sup>79</sup>

When Israel dwelled in their land, the Temple altar atoned for them [the nations]. Thus our sages said: “‘Abbaye said: ‘The seventy bullocks offered during the holiday corresponded to the world’s seventy nations.’

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<sup>78</sup> b. *Pesahim* 118b.

<sup>79</sup> b. *Yebamot* 63a.

What was the purpose of the single bullock? It corresponded to that singular nation. A parable concerning a king who said: 'Prepare a banquet for me.' At the end, he said to his favorite: 'Make me a small meal so that I might take pleasure with you.' R. Yohanan said: 'Woe to the world's nations! For they have suffered a loss yet do not realize what they have lost! For throughout the existence of the Temple, the altar atoned for them. Now, who can atone for them?'"<sup>80</sup>

All of the above is readily explainable. When the central column is nourished, so are all of its branches.<sup>81</sup> This is comparable to the [manifestation] of vitality from the brain to the spine, whence it passes throughout all of the sinews.

**For our vineyard is in blossom:** The parable refers to Israel, who at the time of their origins, their entrance into the land, were in blossom. When their redemption was revealed, it was like the appearance of fruit upon a blossoming vine.

Judgment was decreed and an oath sworn that Israel would not enter the land. The Glory and prophecy removed themselves and the *shekhinah* said in the Glory's departure:

**[2:16] My beloved is mine  
And I am his  
Who browses among the lilies.**

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<sup>80</sup> b. *Sukkah* 55b.

<sup>81</sup> The energy flows through the central column of the *sefirot* and thence to the right and left branches.

**My beloved is mine . . .** : who directs His world through six manifestations which are the ultimate source of all things generated below.

**[2:17] Until the day blows gently  
And the shadows flee,  
Set out my beloved,  
As a gazelle  
Or a young stag,  
For the hills of spices!**

**Until the day blows gently:** When the sin of the Amorites will attain its consummation and their power and might be removed.

**And the shadows flee:** Our Sages said in the Midrash to the Song of Songs: “These are the celestial princes of the nations and their angels.”<sup>82</sup> This is the true interpretation of the verse: “their protection has departed from them” [Num. 14:9] as I have interpreted the verse “I delight to sit in his shade” [Cant. 2:3].

**As a young gazelle:** That is to say, “stand” as you stood when you went from mount to hill and tent to tabernacle.

**For the hills of spices:** An allusion to the departure of the Glory.

**[3:1] Upon my couch at night  
I sought the one I love—  
I sought but found him not.**

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<sup>82</sup> The source of this quotation is unknown. Compare Nahmanides’ commentary to Numbers 14:9.

**Upon my couch:** “Couch” refers to Israel’s forty year sojourn in the wilderness, when they were denied permission to enter the land of Israel.

**At night:** When Israel was in trouble, distress, and darkness.

**I sought:** Israel said: “I have repented in order that the Glory might return to me as at the beginning.”

**I sought him but found him not:** Throughout those forty years, the *shekhinah* had departed and prophecy had ceased. As it is written: “When all the warriors among the people had died off, the Lord spoke to me, saying . . .” [Deut. 2:16–17]. To me was the Word. This reveals that Moses had not prophesied until this moment.

**[3:2] I must rise and roam the town:** Israel adds further, saying: “I engaged in many supplications and circumambulated the Throne of Glory, but to no avail.”

**[3:3] I met the watchmen who patrol the town:** These are Moses and Aaron, engaged in holy service, as it is written: “You and your sons shall take care in performing your priestly duties in everything pertaining to the altar” [Num. 18:7]. I asked them: “Have you seen the one I love?”

**[3:4] Scarcely had I passed them  
When I found the one I love.  
I held him fast, I would not let him go  
Till I brought him to my mother’s house,  
To the chamber of her who conceived me.**

**Scarcely had I passed them:** When Moses died I departed from them until I found Joshua. As it is written: “After the death of Moses, the servant of God, the Lord said to Joshua” [Josh. 1:1] and it says: “Now, cross this river Jordan” [Josh. 1:2].

**I held him fast, I would not let him go:** A parabolic metaphor, indicating that I (Israel) did not stumble in sin until I entered the land during the days of Joshua.

**To my mother’s house:** This is Jerusalem, “within which Righteousness resides” [Isa. 1:21].<sup>83</sup>

**To the chamber of her who conceived me:** This is the Temple.

[3:5] **I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem:** Since I stand in glory and a lofty state, take care that you not sin and cause the departure of the Glory.

[3:6] **Who is she who comes up from the desert  
Like columns of smoke,  
Perfumed with clouds of myrrh and frankincense,  
With all of the powders of the merchant?**

**Who is she who comes up from the desert like columns of smoke:** When journeying before the Israelite camp, the *shekhinah* seemed like a column of smoke, rising upwards and ascending. The verse states “smoke” for she is derived from fire, as it is written: “Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire, the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln” [Exod.

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<sup>83</sup> Righteousness [*tzedek*] symbolizes the *shekhinah*.

19:18]. The *shekhinah* receives her emanative energy primarily from the left side, from darkness.<sup>84</sup> Darkness is elemental fire, as it says concerning it: “Let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die” [Deut. 18:16]. And it says: “When you heard the voice from amidst the darkness” [Deut. 5:19].

**Perfumed with clouds of myrrh and frankincense:**

The verse states “perfumed” for she is energized through her reception of emanative energy from the other *sefirot*. Myrrh and frankincense are visual polarities, myrrh being red, frankincense white.<sup>85</sup> Attend and carefully contemplate the wonders of this parabolic image. It refers to the two cherubim, the world’s fathers. She is situated and receives emanation from both of them.

**With all of the powders of the merchant:** The verse says that while all this is true, she includes all of the other spiritual entities and is sealed with them all.

To this point we have the enquiry of the questioner, the order of the sefirotic entities, and an account of their likeness.

Now for the answer to the question:

**[3:7] This is Solomon’s couch,  
Encircled by sixty warriors  
Of the warriors of Israel.**

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<sup>84</sup> “Darkness” and “fire” here refer to *din*, the force of divine judgment.

<sup>85</sup> Red=*din*; white=*hesed* or divine love.

**This is Solomon's couch:** Of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He.

**Encircled by sixty warriors:** The verse designates sixty corresponding to the six directions.<sup>86</sup> The ten *sefirot* are reflected in each of them. Since the seventh is an intermediate boundary, a spiritual entity upholding them all, and from it all things derive nurturance, it is not included in the sum, as we will explain further on. The verse designates them as warriors as they receive their being from the side of divine justice. And it enquires further over what they are appointed—over justice.

**[3:8] All of them trained in warfare,  
Skilled in battle,  
Each with sword on thigh,  
Because of terror by night.**

All of this constitutes the context of the parable, as we explained earlier in the introduction to the text. As a similar example we find: “From the mouths of infants and sucklings you have founded strength on account of Your foes, to put an end to enemy and avenger” [Ps. 8:3]. And “Mighty king who loves equity” [Ps. 99:4].

**Because of terror by night:** The Sages said: “from the terror of hell which is likened to night.”<sup>87</sup> This is said in truth for it is from night (divine Justice) that the *shekhinah* receives her emanation.

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<sup>86</sup> The six *sefirot* from *hesed* to *yesod*.

<sup>87</sup> Midrash Yalkut Shim'oni *ad locum*.

The text begins to set forth the hierarchy of emanation.

**[3:9] . Behold King Solomon made for himself a  
palanquin  
Of wood from Lebanon.**

From the outpouring of Wisdom and its lumin-  
escence, He radiated light, and from it drew forth emana-  
tion. Concerning this it states in Genesis Rabbah [3:4]:  
“Whence was the light created? The Holy One, blessed  
be He, enwrapped Himself as in a robe, and radiated His  
luster from one end of the world to the other.” The robe  
designates the invocation of the emanation of wisdom  
which encompasses the totality of all things. The act of  
enwrapping conveys that He received radiance from that  
emanational outflow and literally sparked forth light.  
This is furthermore the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer the  
Great who said:

Whence were the heavens created? He took from  
the light of His garment; He wrapped Himself as  
in a robe. The light extended outwards, as it says:  
“wrapped in a robe of light, You spread the  
heavens like a tent cloth” [Ps. 104:2]. Whence  
was the earth created? God took hold of some of  
the snow underlying the Throne of Glory and  
cast it downwards. As it says: “He commands the  
snow: ‘Fall to the ground!’” [Job 37:6].<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, 3. *Hvei aretz*, “fall to the ground,” means  
literally “become ground.”

This accords with the opinion of Plato, who argued that it was vain to believe that the Creator created something from nothing, but rather there was a preexistent matter. This is not the same as clay in the potter's hands or the smith's iron, who shape from them whatsoever they desire, so that the Creator, be He praised, shaped heaven and earth from primordial matter, but sometime might create something else of it. That God does not create something from nothing should not be considered a diminution of His power, just as there is no diminution in His inability to create logically impossible entities, such as a square whose diagonal is equal to its side or the simultaneous conjunction of two opposites. Just as in these cases, there is no diminution in His capacity, so too there is no denigration if He does not emanate something from nothing, but rather uses a primal element. For this too is included in the general category of impossibility. Solomon too spoke of this, revealing lucid wisdom and sound reasoning, through the aegis of the holy spirit of prophecy.

**Of wood from Lebanon:** Thence originates the emanation of all, including the [sefirotic] existences. [There] emanation began, as our sages say: “‘Let there be light and there was light.’ Not ‘then there was light,’ but ‘there *was* light’—light which already existed.”<sup>89</sup> For it was already emanated from the supernal light which existed in the transcendent potentiality.

**[3:10] He made its posts of silver,  
Its back of gold,**

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<sup>89</sup> Gen. Rabbah 3:2.

**Its seat of purple wool.  
Within, it was decked with love  
By the maidens of Jerusalem.**

**He made its posts of silver:** This is the “right hand” of the Holy One, blessed be He, which the Book of Creation [2:1] designates as the “scale of merit.”

**Its back of gold:** This is the left hand, designated “the scale of guilt.”<sup>90</sup>

**Its seat of purple wool:** This is the central pillar designated as the central “tongue of the statute” mediating between them. So our Sages say: “‘Upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form’ [Ezek. 1:26]. It was designated as purple,”<sup>91</sup> for just as purple wool is woven out of many types of colors, so too the central pillar receives from this one and that. And so it states: “like the appearance of the bow in the cloud was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of God” [Ezek. 1:28].

**Within, it was decked with love:** This is the *shekhinah*.

**By the maidens of Jerusalem:** The Central Column. This is the meaning of “a man’s wife,” concerning which the prophet said (of those men who brought home foreign

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<sup>90</sup> Ms. reading is quite different here: the right hand is “water from air,” the left is “fire.” The central pillar is “truth, justice, peace, seal of the structure, the seal of God.”

<sup>91</sup> In Numbers Rabbah 12:4?

wives): “Has not one done this out of excess of spirit? What does one seek but godly seed?” [Mal. 2:15].<sup>92</sup>

**[3:11] Go forth and see, O daughters of Jerusalem  
King Solomon, in the crown with which  
His mother crowned him  
On the day of his wedding,  
Day of his heart’s delight.**

**King Solomon:** The king of peace.

**The crown with which his mother crowned him on his wedding day:** The entire sefirotic edifice coheres and is unified and ascends towards infinity, nor does it suffer a departure of the holy spirit. The crown stands for the emanation of blessing and superabundance from the spirit of the living God designated as the mother in the Midrash to Proverbs,<sup>93</sup> in the Rabbis’ exegesis of “May your father and mother rejoice” [Prov. 23:25]. Rabbi Akiba states: “Even the Holy One, blessed be He, rejoiced in him, as Wisdom rejoiced in him. As it says: ‘Let your father rejoice’: this is the Holy One, blessed be He. ‘And your mother’: this is that wise woman of whom it is written: ‘You shall call understanding a mother’ [Prov. 2:3].” Consequently, blessing, sanctification and unification which draw energy from the negation of

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<sup>92</sup> The obscure passage seems to mean that *shekhinah* is wife to the Central Column, source of godly seed; so too should Israel, husbands and wives, bear godly seed.

<sup>93</sup> Midrash Mishle, ed. B. Wissocsky, p. 57.

thought are designated as the diadem and crown. Our sages say in the Midrash to Psalms [19:2]: “The angel assigned to Israel’s prayers waits until her final congregation has prayed and weaves them into a crown for the Holy One. As it says: ‘Blessings alight upon the head of the righteous, the life of all worlds’ [Prov. 10:6].” For this reason, the sages ordained the Sanctus and blessing within the blessings attached to the recitation of the *shema*, and placed the unification of *shema* in close proximity to them. And they ordained that all three<sup>94</sup> should be recited in the great Sanctus of the Additional Prayer. For these three enter under the rubric of the unity of divine Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge, the emanational edifice containing the seven (lower) *sefirot*. Because all of the ten *sefirot* are included within the (upper) three: Wisdom, Knowledge, and Understanding, the three recitations of the Sanctus<sup>95</sup> exist to unify them. Within their totality, all things are included. So we have found in the Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer:<sup>96</sup> “The world was created with ten statements but these were included in three. As it says: ‘God established the earth in wisdom, founded the heavens in understanding, through His knowledge the depths were split and the heavens shower dew’ [Prov. 3:19].”

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<sup>94</sup> Sanctification [*kadosh*], blessing [*barukh*], and *shema* ‘.

<sup>95</sup> This could refer either to the threefold repetition of “Holy” or to the three *kedushot* of the daily morning service.

<sup>96</sup> Chapter 3, end.

**[4:1] Ah, you are fair, my darling,  
Ah, you are fair.  
Your eyes are like doves  
Behind your veil.**

These are the words of the Glory when he dwelt with His mighty Presence in the House built by Solomon. For that generation was perfect; the time was a period of peace and joy; anguish and sighing were put to flight. The Glory sets forth the praise of Her eyes and hair, her lips and neck. All these are similes and parables known to the mystical illuminati.

**[4:6] When the day blows gently  
And the shadows flee,  
I will betake me to the mount of myrrh,  
To the hill of frankincense.**

**When the day blows gently:** This refers to the removal of the sovereignty of the nations.

**And the shadows flee:** As we have explained.

**I will betake myself to the mountain of myrrh:** This is Jerusalem, as it is written: "In Jerusalem which is upon Mt. Moriah" [II Chron. 3:1].

**To the hill of frankincense:** This is Mt. Zion. Jerusalem is compared to myrrh which is red, referring to the attribute of justice, as it says: "Within her righteousness dwells" [Isa. 1:21]. Mt. Zion is compared to a hill of frankincense, the attribute of compassion. This verse refers to the time when Israel acts in accordance with rectitude, in accord to justice and the Torah. The

*shekhinah* was lovely, beautified by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, over all the glory hangs a canopy and crown. In contrast to this, she is like a bird wandering from her nest, departing her house and kingdom, as it states: “A son who causes shame and disgrace, plunders his father, puts his mother to flight” [Prov. 19:26].

**[4:8] From Lebanon come with me;  
From Lebanon, my bride with me.**

**From Lebanon my bride with me:** The Glory says (to the *shekhinah*): “You were with me among the profound essences,<sup>97</sup> hidden within primordial Wisdom.”

**From Lebanon come with me:** You came forth and were emanated with me from a single place.<sup>98</sup> The parable refers to the journeying of the *shekhinah* before the Israelite camp to seek out resting places, as it is written: “The Ark of the Covenant traveled in front of them on that three days’ journey to seek out a resting place for them” [Num. 10:33].

**[4:9] You have ravished my heart,  
My sister, my bride,  
With one of your eyes,  
With one coil of your necklace.**

**You have ravished my heart . . . my bride: Your**

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<sup>97</sup> *Ha-havayot ha-‘amukot*, i.e., the uppermost *sefirot*.

<sup>98</sup> Following ms. *mi-makom ehad*. *Shekhinah*’s origin is one with that of the Glory, in the most hidden sefirotic realms.

extraordinary attractiveness has stopped my heart. This [ravishing of the heart] is the thing and its opposite, similar to “they shall ash the altar” [Num. 4:13].<sup>99</sup> For desire and inclination and their union are drawn to her lofty beauty.

**With one of your eyes:** This refers to the generation of Solomon, a perfect one, all righteous, including the Sanhedrin of sages who know the wisdom of the proper times. They are called “eyes” for they are the light of the world, as in “if it was in error, hidden from the eyes of the community” [Num. 15:24]. It says “one” because that generation was singular; there was never another like it, either earlier or later.

**With one coil of your necklace:** This is an allusion to the king, the glory of his people. Because he foresaw through the holy spirit of prophecy that in the future the kingdom would be split asunder into two states after his demise, he specified “with one coil of your necklace,” meaning “while the kingdom is yet one.”

The Glory begins to expound upon the pleasantness of her love, the scent of her ointments and garments, the honey of her lips.

**[4:10] How sweet is your love . . .**

**How much more delightful your lover than wine,  
Your ointments more fragrant  
Than any spice!**

He said: **How sweet is your love** emanating forth

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<sup>99</sup> Ravishing excites and stops the heart at once. “Ashing” the altar means *removing* the ashes.

from the wine of Torah, that is to say, Wisdom's font and its paths.

**Your ointments more fragrant:** The allusion is to the expanding light of Wisdom, descending via its attributes, drawn out of that place encompassing all spices.<sup>100</sup>

**[4:11] Sweetness drops**

**From your lips, O bride;  
Honey and milk  
Are under your tongue;  
And the scent of your robes  
Is like the scent of Lebanon.**

**Honey and milk:** The allusion is to the two modalities of Torah (written and oral) and the fact that the *shekhinah* is situated between the two cherubim.

**And the scent of your robes:** The robe is not an entity distinct from Her. Rather, it is the overflow of Wisdom's brightness which surrounds her. Our Sages state in Genesis Rabbah [21:5] concerning the verse "I looked and saw a man dressed in linen" [Daniel 10:5]: "He was comparable to a snail whose shell is inseparable from his body." Since Wisdom's brightness, encompassing thirty-two paths, surrounds the Glory, as in "Your faithful ones surround You" [Ps. 89:8], it is called "the garment of God," as it says: "You are garbed in splendor and majesty" [Ps. 104:1].

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<sup>100</sup> The light of Wisdom is the flow of sefirotic energy, coming from supernal *hokhmah*, the source of all the *sefirot*.

In order to fulfill the verse “You shall walk in His ways” [Deut. 28:9], Israel were commanded to wrap themselves in the *tallit*,<sup>101</sup> which possesses thirty-two fringes. Concerning the *tallit* it is written: “You shall gaze upon them and remember all of God’s commandments” [Num. 15:39]. Now Wisdom encompasses, is endiademmed and crowned<sup>102</sup> with six hundred and thirteen precious gems. For each of the thirty-two paths within is divisible into two portions: good and evil, the positive and negative commandments. This division finds allusion in the ten divine statements (revealed directly at Sinai) in the words “remember” and “keep” the Sabbath day.<sup>103</sup> Thus there are sixty-four paths. And as each and every one contains the ten [*sefirot*], their sum is six hundred and forty. If one deletes the twenty-seven letters of the Torah,<sup>104</sup> the final sum is six hundred and thirteen. Thus concerning the fringes, Scripture states: “You shall gaze upon them and remember all of God’s commandments”

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<sup>101</sup> Prayer shawl, a rectangular garment bearing fringes at its four corners.

<sup>102</sup> *Me-‘uteret u-mukhteret.*

<sup>103</sup> The two versions of the decalogue (Exod. 20 and Deut. 5) differ in the wording of the Sabbath command. Exodus says “Remember the Sabbath Day” and Deuteronomy says “keep.” These are taken to refer to positive and prohibitive aspects of Sabbath observance, and then generalized to refer to positive and negative commandments altogether. For kabbalists they also refer to the two *sefirot yesod* and *malkhut*.

<sup>104</sup> Twenty-two plus the five final forms.

[Num. 15:39]. Therefore our sages said in the tractate *Shavuot*: “The precept of fringes equals all of the commandments.”<sup>105</sup>

It is incumbent upon us to engage in a detailed enquiry concerning all of the commandments, to find an allusion pointing to them in the ten divine statements revealed at Sinai. This is comparable to the manner in which the sages of Israel sought an allusion in the Torah for every aspect of fundamental ethics and courtesy which was not included within its commandments. Thus our sages<sup>106</sup> stated that R. Yohanan encountered a child who was reciting: “A man’s folly subverts his way and his heart rages against the Lord” [Prov. 19:3]. He said: “Does Scripture<sup>107</sup> contain anything which is not already intimated in the Torah? An allusion to this indeed appears in the Torah. Their hearts sank; and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’ [Gen. 42:28]. How much the more so should we say concerning the fundamentals of the Torah and its precepts that there is no doubt that the six hundred and thirteen commandments find their allusion in that divine voice described as ‘a great voice, which went on no more’ [Deut. 5:19].”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> b. *Nedarim* 25b.

<sup>106</sup> In b. *Ta’anit* 9a.

<sup>107</sup> The prophetic and hagiographic sections of the Bible.

<sup>108</sup> And thus everything must be included within it. Alternatively the concluding phrase *ve-lo’ yasaf* can be understood as “and He added

We should interpret each and every commandment in accord with our path, determining from which *sefirah* it derives and finding allusion to all of the reasons for the commandments which are not explicitly stated in the Torah. The reasons of many precepts are indeed explicated, an example being the law concerning the first born: “When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of man and beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons” [Exod. 13:15]. A similar case is that of tithes: “You shall consume the tithes of your new grain . . . before the Lord” which concludes “so that you might learn to revere the Lord your God forever” [Deut. 14:23]. Like these are many other commandments whose meaning is explained. But there are many whose purpose are not explicated, such as the reason for sacrifice, the Sabbatical year and Jubilee, circumcision, the blowing of the ram’s horn at New Year’s, forbidden acts of sexual union, oaths, vows and phylacteries, ritual fringes, Naziriteship, the palmfrond and citron, the ban on the consumption of the produce of fruit-bearing trees during their first three harvest years, the mixing of seeds in a field, the sacrifice of the red heifer, and many others, excluding those whose meaning is hinted at where they are mentioned.

You should realize that all of the precepts depend upon two fundamental principles: the positive and negative commandments. The positive commandments are

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nothing [further].”

born of the quality of remembrance [*zakhor*]; the negative commandments of the quality of observance [*shamor*]. It is also well known that remembrance and observance correspond to two of the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. Consequently, an individual who performs the command of his master and fulfills it, does so as a consequence of the quality of love. This constitutes the highest degree [of service] and the most excellent virtue, and corresponds to the category of positive commandments. An individual who desists from performing a deed out of fear of his master, does so as a consequence of the quality of awe. This stands on a lower rung than the quality of love, just as negative commandments occupy a gradation lower than the positive. For the person who fulfills the command of his master with his body and his possessions is not to be likened to one who is scrupulous about desisting from evil out of fear of him. Thus our Sages say: “Concerning what situation were these matters related? Concerning negative commandments. That is to say that the transgressor is smitten with forty lashes. However, with respect to positive commandments, such as the case when they instruct him to construct a Sukkah but he does not build it, or take a palm frond but he does not do so, they smite him until his soul departs his body.”<sup>109</sup>

All of the above derives from the principles of “remembrance” and “observance,” for the quality of re-

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<sup>109</sup> b. *Ketubot* 86a. The two examples given refer to the commandments of the *Sukkot* festival, but could be any positive commandments of the Torah.

membrance occupies a gradation higher than that of observance and the branches which derive from it are in its likeness. Since Abraham our father took divine love as his portion, corresponding to remembrance, and he knew God's name with a true and real knowledge, the Omnipresent One called him "My lover." Nor is the [attainment of the] quality of love possible save through perfect knowledge. Thus one finds that many principles of the negative commandments are derived from the positive. For the quality of love exists within the quality of awe, since awe derives from love and is thus included within it.

You should know that a human being, by nature and the process of generation, contains and is impressed with the stamp of these two qualities, that is to say the essential force of the positive and negative commandments, that is water and fire, the former at his right hand, the latter at his left. This is as our sages said: "Two angels escort an individual, one good and one evil."<sup>110</sup> And as that wise man said: "A wise man's heart tends towards the right hand, a fool's to the left" [Eccles. 10:2]. It is the truth that right conduct and the inclination to good are on the right while evil behavior and the inclination towards wickedness are on the left, as is the Accuser. Concerning this David said: "I am ever mindful of the Lord's presence; He is at my right hand, I shall never be shaken" [Ps. 16:8]. "I shall not be shaken": I shall never neglect, even for an instant, that inclination towards the good that stands at my right hand.

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<sup>110</sup> Shabbat 119b.

Since these two qualities, the inclination to the good and the inclination to evil, which correspond to the positive and negative commandments, are impressed upon human nature, the Torah was given with positive and negative commandments to direct an individual and habituate him towards positive qualities. The inclination towards evil would be drawn after the good and annihilated within it. Concerning this our sages said: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart’ [Deut. 6:5]—with your two inclinations, towards good and evil.”<sup>111</sup> This is the purpose of the commandments, the acts of worship, prayers, and fasting. They serve to subjugate the evil inclination so that it might be rendered subordinate to the impulse towards good. Thus the body, whose foundation is dust and nature evil and which descends below, will be drawn after the faculty of the soul, whose foundation is life, whose nature is wholly for the good and ascends upwards. Give careful heed and listen to my wondrous words, let them always be present before your eyes, for they are pleasant and should be stored inside you.

[There ensues a listing of the six hundred and thirteen commandments, as derived from the ten. See Chavel’s edition of the Hebrew text in *Kitvey RaMBaN II*, pp. 521–48. The concluding summary of that discussion follows.]

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<sup>111</sup> b. *Berakhot* 54a.

These<sup>112</sup> are the six hundred and thirteen commandments, positive and negative, derived from the ten commandments as “Remember” and “Observe.” Of this our rabbis said: “‘Remember’ and ‘Observe’ were proclaimed in a single utterance, something no mouth could speak nor any ear hear.”<sup>113</sup> No one voice could simultaneously speak two things, opposite to one another, positive and negative; such is beyond the capacity of the human mouth or ear. He explained the two hundred forty-eight positive commandments guiding the human limbs,<sup>114</sup> which number two hundred forty-eight, in a goodly and upright path, thus purifying, cleansing, and sanctifying the person that he might resemble his Maker. The remaining three hundred sixty-five commandments guide the sinews, which are of that number, in a goodly and upright way, keeping the person from evil paths and ugly qualities. Thus body and soul will be on a single path in harmony with one another.

You should know that the Torah is entirely clear, spoken by the divine dynamis,<sup>115</sup> containing not a single letter or vowel point that is not needed. All of it is a divine structure, hewn out in the name<sup>116</sup> of the blessed

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<sup>112</sup> The following, down to the resumption of the commentary with 4:12, is found on p. 548 of Chavel’s Hebrew edition.

<sup>113</sup> b. *Rosh Hashanah* 27a.

<sup>114</sup> Also said to number 248, according to a Talmudic source (*Makkot* 23b).

<sup>115</sup> Or: from the mouth of *gevurah*, the God of power.

<sup>116</sup> Perhaps should read: “hewn out of”; *mi-shemo* rather than

Holy One. There is no difference between “Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz” [Gen. 36:12] or “the chieftain of Magdiel, the chieftan of Eram” [Gen. 36:43] and the ten commandments or “Hear O Israel” [Deut. 6:4]. Whoever deletes a single letter is like one who deletes God’s whole name and a whole world. Therefore it was necessary that the letters and words be counted, that *plene* and *lene*<sup>117</sup> spellings be recorded, forms written but not pronounced, as well as forms pronounced but not written, open and closed beginnings of sections [i.e., paragraph divisions], larger and smaller letters. Let this be implanted in your heart and inscribed within you. Take care for your soul and lend no ear to [those who] say that Ezra the Scribe added things of his own accord as he copied it, such as “The Canaanites were then in the land” [Gen. 13:6] or “Behold his bed, a bed of iron” [Deut. 3:11].<sup>118</sup> This is total heresy, that of which the rabbis spoke in the chapter called “A Portion,” on the verse “For he has despised the word of the Lord” [Num. 15:31]: “This refers to one who says ‘Torah is not from heaven.’ Even one who says that all of Torah is from heaven except for a single verse that Moses spoke on his own: such a person ‘despises the word of the Lord.’”<sup>119</sup>

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*bi-shemo.*

<sup>117</sup> “Full” and “lacking,” two ways of spelling Hebrew words.

<sup>118</sup> These passages seem to indicate a later narrative voice, as was already noted by several medieval authors. See commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra to Deut. 1:2.

<sup>119</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 99a.

Because the commandments are the very body of purity and holiness, and the one concerned with them becomes purified and holy, Scripture said **the fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon**,<sup>120</sup> for that fragrance is the life of both worlds.

**[4:12] A garden locked  
Is my own, my bride,  
A fountain locked,  
A sealed-up spring.**

**A garden locked is my own, my bride:** The *shekhinah* is compared to a garden, since a person plants and fences it, bringing in water to irrigate it and producing all manner of lovely herbage and plants. The *shekhinah*'s fence is the cherubim, the plants are the seventy nations, the trees are the angels. All these are supplied by that spring which proceeds from Wisdom's paradise, within which souls flower in joy. It flows forth without ceasing either day or night; on its account the world is sustained. As our sages said in tractate Yoma:<sup>121</sup> "On account of the righteous one is the world created and sustained," as it says: "The righteous one is the world's foundation" [Prov. 10:25].<sup>122</sup> Our sages also said concerning this: "The circumference of the tree of life is a

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<sup>120</sup> Deriving "Lebanon" from *libbun*, "cleansing."

<sup>121</sup> b. *Yoma* 38b.

<sup>122</sup> *Zaddik* or "the righteous" is *yesod*, the source of sefirotic energy as it flows into the *shekhinah*.

journey of five hundred years and all of the waters of creation are divided forth from it.” Rabbi Yehudah said: “It is not the circumference of its bough, but its trunk that constitutes a journey of five hundred years.”<sup>123</sup>

“A river goes forth from Eden to water the garden” [Gen. 2:10]. The garden constitutes the beginning of the differentiated universe. As it says: “from there it divides and becomes four branches” [ibid.]. The verse is in present tense, the process is eternal. Thus it says: “There is a river whose streams gladden God’s city, the holy dwelling-place of the Most High” [Ps. 46:5]. And “You make springs gush forth in torrents; they make their way between the hills, giving drink to all the wild beasts” [Ps. 104:10–11].

Concerning this spring, it states: “a garden spring, a well of fresh water, flowing streams from Lebanon” [Cant. 4:15]. Our Sages of blessed memory said: “‘a garden spring’: this is Jacob who is a spring for the garden. ‘A well of fresh water’: this is Isaac. ‘Flowing streams’: this is Abraham.”<sup>124</sup> Everything is sated from that Lebanon which is divine Wisdom.<sup>125</sup>

Contemplate the wonders of this symbolism and you will know and understand what our Sages wrote, the

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<sup>123</sup> Genesis Rabbah 15:7.

<sup>124</sup> No such interpretation is found in the extant rabbinic sources. It is also found, however, in Zohar 1:135b, a passage possibly dependent upon R. Ezra.

<sup>125</sup> The three patriarchs represent *hesed*, *gevurah*, and *tiferet*, way-stations in the flow of life from Wisdom, the primal sefirotic font, to the *shekhinah*.

manner in which their words constitute the height of completeness and perfection. Such truly befits sages like these, whose every word was uttered through the holy spirit in allegoric allusion, so as to arouse the consciousness of the Kabbalistic illuminati, rather than the fools, idiots, and confused who treat their words as if they were fox fables! Thus we find in the tractate Sanhedrin: “‘As I looked upon, thrones were set down . . .’ [Dan. 7:9]—one for God and one for David: these are the words of R. Akiba. R. Yose the Galilean said to him: ‘Akiba, how long are you going to profane the *shekhinah*!?’ Rather, one throne is for justice and one is for righteousness.’ R. Elazar b. Azaryah said to Akiba: ‘What are you doing occupying yourself with words of *aggadah*!?’ Desist from your discourse and occupy yourself with the laws of leprosy and tents.<sup>126</sup> Rather one is a throne and one is for a footstool: a throne upon which to sit, a footstool to rest the feet.’”<sup>127</sup> Surely these sages had no essential argument with one another, but they differed on whether it was appropriate to reveal the secret meaning. This occurs in several places where the rabbis are in dispute.

**A garden locked:** A closed gate.

**A fountain sealed:** The light lacks nothing for it is preserved in its “grapes” from the seven days of creation.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Return to your safe haven of halakhic expertise.

<sup>127</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 38b.

<sup>128</sup> Here the light imagery becomes that of wine. The primal flow is as perfect and undiminished as it was before creation, before the flow

**[4:13] Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates  
And of all luscious fruits. . . .**

Solomon mentions here [Cant. 4:14] the twelve types of spices, corresponding to the twelve channels of the Holy One, blessed be He, through which the fragrance of divine Wisdom spreads forth and is directed towards the Patriarchs.

**[4:16] Awake, O north wind,  
Come, O south wind,  
Blow upon my garden,  
That its perfume might spread.  
Let my beloved come to his garden  
And enjoy its luscious fruits.**

**Awake, O north wind:** Awake O attribute of the north, that great fire which consumes the holocaust offering and the fat upon the altar.

**Come, O south wind:** After the attribute of the north takes its portion, the attribute of the south draws its sustenance.<sup>129</sup> The two of them draw forth and supply us from that spirit which overabounds in its provision and support. This is the meaning of **blow upon my garden, that its perfume might flow**. The spiced perfumes represent the emanation of the radiance of Wisdom with

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through the seven primal “days.”

<sup>129</sup> “North” is kabbalistically *din*, divine judgment, and “South” is *hesed*, divine love.

the addition of the Holy Spirit,<sup>130</sup> drawn closer in great abundance to the Patriarchs<sup>131</sup> on account of the sacrifice.

Concerning this our sages stated allusively: “‘Awake, O north wind’—this is the holocaust offering slaughtered on the northern side of the altar. ‘Come, O south wind’—these are the whole offerings slaughtered on the southern side of the altar. ‘That its perfume might spread’: this is incense. ‘Let my beloved come to his garden’: this is the *shekhinah*. ‘And enjoy its luscious fruits’: these are the sacrifices.”<sup>132</sup>

**And enjoy its luscious fruits:** This is the sifted flour refined of its waste matter. In accordance with this theme it is said: “An offering by fire, of pleasing odor to the Lord” [Lev. 1:17]. Our sages say in *Torat Kohanim*: “‘An offering’: it must be specifically for an offering.” This refers to the tenth *Sefirah* [the *shekhinah*] which ascends above to the place of its origin.<sup>133</sup> “‘By fire’: for the sake of the fires.” Our master, the Hasid of blessed memory,<sup>134</sup> explained that these are corporeal things. “‘For an aroma’: for the sake of providing an aroma”—the spiritual dimension of physical things. “‘A pleasing aroma’: in order to be pleasing (to God).” Pleasure entails the

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<sup>130</sup> *Hokhmah* and *binah*.

<sup>131</sup> The intermediate *sefirot*: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent *hesed*, *din*, and *tiferet*.

<sup>132</sup> Cant. Rabbah 4:31.

<sup>133</sup> Literally “an ascent for ascent.” Or “an ascent unto the Name.”

<sup>134</sup> The reference is to R. Isaac the Blind.

invocation of Penitence, the hidden place of His power.  
“For the Lord’: for the One who created the world.”

The intent of the sacrifice is to provide sustenance to each and every divine attribute. This was the intent of the princes of Israel when they offered twelve goats, twelve rams, twelve lambs for a burnt offering, and twelve billy goats for a sin offering when the altar was consecrated. Everything is transmuted into spirit via the sefirotic channels which number twelve. And twenty-four bullocks were offered as sacrifices of well being, corresponding to the power of the left side of divinity, the aspect of Might, which is twenty-four [ט"ד], as it is written: “I will lay carbuncles [*kadkod*] as your foundation stones” [Isa. 54:12]. This alludes to the twenty-four permutations of the divine name *Adonai*. The sacrifices of well-being constituted sixty rams, sixty billy goats, and sixty yearling lambs [Num. 7:88]. These correspond to the sixty steps, the sixty heroes [Cant. 3:7], and the three-score queens [Cant. 6:8]. The meaning of a pleasing [*nihoah*] aroma is that of descent, the Aramaic of descent [*yarad*] being *nahat*. Through the sacrifice, divine spirit descends and the force of holiness unites and is drawn into close contiguity within the channels. For this reason, sacrifice is designated *korban*. This is the meaning of “Let my beloved come to his garden and enjoy its luscious fruits.”

**[5:1] I have come to my garden,  
My own, my bride;  
I have plucked my myrrh and spice,  
Eaten my honey and honeycomb,**

**Drunk my wine and my milk.  
Eat, lovers and drink:  
Drink deep of love!**

**I have plucked my myrrh and spice:** The incense composed of frankincense and the frankincense added to the meal offering.

**Eaten my honey and honeycomb:** The daily offerings and the additional offerings of New Moons, Sabbaths and holidays, vows and votive offerings, sin and guilt offerings, sacrifices of the firstborn and tithes.

**Eat, lovers:** These are the priests.

**And drink: Drink deep of love!:** This is the community of Israel. This verse relates to the generation of King Solomon, when Israel enjoyed a peaceful respite from wars.

All of its people were saintly,  
Cleansed of iniquity and sin,  
Rejoicing in God's service,  
Forgiven through their sacrifices,  
Amongst them dwelled *shekhinah*,  
"A mother joyous amid her children" [Ps. 113:9].

Within this text you will find the term bride used six times.<sup>135</sup> This corresponds to the six appearances of the name Solomon which are regarded as designating the divine within this book, alluding to the six sefirotic dimensions.

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<sup>135</sup> From Cant. 4:8 to 5:1.

As her name so is her praise,  
She is the bride  
Encompassing all  
Of Wisdom's paths.  
Stamped with the seal  
Of the whole.

**[5:2] I was asleep,  
But my heart was wakeful.  
Hark, my beloved knocks!  
“Let me in, my own,  
My darling, my faultless dove!  
For my head is drenched with dew!”**

**I was asleep:** The *shekhinah* states, I was asleep in Babylonian exile.

**But my heart was wakeful:** Anticipating the time of redemption, “until the time of the fulfillment of Jerusalem’s desolation, seventy years.”<sup>136</sup> This was actually eighteen years after Cyrus’ declaration, which preceded the fulfillment of the seventy years promised for Babylonian domination.<sup>137</sup>

**Hark, my beloved knocks!:** This parable alludes to the Glory arousing the prophets to prophecy to Israel that they should ascend from Babylon to Jerusalem.

**For my head is drenched with dew:** I’ve had enough of dwelling outside of the Temple.

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<sup>136</sup> Daniel 9:2.

<sup>137</sup> v. Jer. 29:8. also look at Seder Olam ch. 30 ala Milikovsky.

[5:3] The people Israel says “**I had taken off my robe; was I to don it again?**”: I had stripped myself of my adornments. The parable refers to the Glory which had dwelled within me and had departed.

“**I had bathed my feet; was I to soil them again?**”: I have dwelled here and built houses, planted gardens and orchards. How could I depart?

[5:4] **My beloved took his hand off the latch**: The Glory sent punitive decrees from the heavens for I did not believe in the prophets’ words and did not ascend.

**And my heart was stirred for him**: I realized that these troubles were caused by that sin.

[5:5] **I arose to let in my beloved**” The parable means that a portion of them ascended to the land of Israel.

**My hands dripped myrrh, my fingers, flowing myrrh**: That is to say that I succeeded in the enterprise. As it is stated in Ezra [6:14]: “So the elders of the Judeans progressed in the building, urged on by the prophesying of Haggai the prophet. . . .”

[5:6] **I opened the door for my beloved**: The parable refers to the rebuilt Temple.

**But my beloved had turned and gone**: The *shekhinah* did not dwell there and prophecy in Israel ceased. Forty years after the Temple was built, prophetic vision was sealed. As our sages state in *Seder Olam*: “Alexander, king of Macedonia, reigned twelve years and died.” Until this time the prophets prophesied through the

holy spirit. From this time onwards, “Incline your ears and listen to the sages’ words” [Prov. 22:17]. As our Sages said in tractate Yoma: “Why is it written: ‘rebuild the House, then I will look on it with favor and I will glorify it’ [Haggai 1:8] where the transmitted text states ‘I will be glorified.’<sup>138</sup> These are the five differences distinguishing the first Temple from the second. They are: the Ark of the Covenant, the Urim and Tummim, the anointing oil, the heavenly fire upon the altar and the divine presence.”<sup>139</sup> This is the proper rendition of the text.

[5:7] Consequently, upon the departure of the *shekhinah*, many and horrific troubles befell me, caused by the watchmen patrolling the town. These are the seventy angels who surround God’s Throne of Glory; through them harsh decrees enter the world. As it states in the Chapters of R. Eliezer [chap. 24] concerning: “‘Let us, then, go down and confound their speech . . .’ [Gen.11:7]. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels surrounding His Throne of Glory: ‘let us go and confound their speech.’” They are similarly called *shomrei homot*: “the guards of the walls.” This passage is a parable for the evil decrees and persecutions which befell the Jewish people during the period of the Second Temple by the hands of the Greeks.

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<sup>138</sup> We are dealing with *ketiv / keriv*—the written text is *akhbed* (I will be glorified) but it is pronounced *akhbadah* (I will glorify it). The difference between the text as written and pronounced is the letter *heh*, whose numerical equivalent is five.

<sup>139</sup> b. *Yoma* 21b.

One thing you need to know is that a decree was enacted that Israel would be subjugated to four kingdoms, not counting the period of servitude in Egypt, for Israel was not yet a people and not designated as the people of God until they entered the land and constructed the Temple. These four nations were revealed to our father Abraham during “the covenant between the pieces” [Gen. 15], just as they were shown to Daniel.<sup>140</sup> The three year old calf of Abraham’s vision is the kingdom of Babylon, that is to say Nebuchadnezzar its king; the three-year old goat is Greece, that is, Alexander the Macedonian, and he is the ram [*tzfir ‘izim*] mentioned in Daniel [8:4]. The turtledove represents Rome, also known as Edom.

The kingdom of Babylon is referred to as being three-fold because three kings arose from it: Nebuchadnezzar, Ebel Merodach, and Balshezzar. Thus it is written in Jeremiah [27:7]: “All of the nations shall serve him, his son and grandson, until the turn of his own land comes, when many nations and great kings shall subjugate him.” Greece is referred to as a three-year old goat because Alexander was the king of the north who conquered the other three directions of the world and governed them just as Nebuchadnezzar had ruled the entire world. As it is written: “raising from their thrones, all of the kings of the nations” [Isa. 14:9]. The three-year old ram represents the Medeans, these being the kings of Assyria, Cyrus and Darius. As it is written: “They joyfully cele-

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<sup>140</sup> See Daniel 8.

brated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days, for the Lord had given them cause for joy by inclining the heart of the Assyrian king toward them so as to give them the support in the work of the House of God, the God of Israel” [Ezra 6:22]. Because they were Shem’s descendants, they merited that the Temple be constructed on their account, and it was not destroyed by the hand of Senacherib.

Scripture refers to them as a three-year old [ram] for they were the kings of the east, who conquered the other three directions of the world. As we find in Isaiah [46:11]: “I summoned that swooping bird from the east” and “Who has roused a victor from the east?” [Isa. 41:2]<sup>141</sup> He conquered the three remaining directions of the world, as it states: “I saw a ram butting westward, northward, and southward” [Dan. 8:4]. And it says: “So says Cyrus, the king of Persia: ‘The Lord, God of heaven, has granted me all of the kingdoms of the world’” [II Chron. 36:23]. The turtledove represents the wicked one, the fourth awful and mighty beast viewed by Daniel. He desired to comprehend its true meaning, as it is written: “I approached one of the attendants and asked him the true meaning of all of this” [Daniel 7:16]. It is said concerning this beast: “it will devour the whole earth, tread it down and crush it.” R. Yohanan said: “It is requisite that Rome’s nature spread throughout the entire world.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> The verses refer to Cyrus.

<sup>142</sup> b. *Avodah Zarah* 2b. “Rome” and “Edom” for the medieval Jews

Israel underwent subjugation to these nations in accord with the following order. Senacherib, king of Assyria, who was also king of Media, exiled the ten tribes. “He settled them in Halah, along the Habor [and] the river Gozan, and in the towns of Media” [II Kings 18:11]. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, at the appointed time, exiled Judah and Benjamin. Isaiah the prophet forecast the downfall of Babylon by the hands of the Medes, just as he forecasted Cyrus’ command for Israel’s manumission. “Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who do not value silver or delight in gold” [Isa. 13:17]. At the prophecy’s conclusion he states: “And when the Lord has given you rest from your sorrow and trouble, and from the hard service that you were made to serve, you shall recite this song of scorn over the king of Babylon” [Isa. 14:3–4]. Then follows the song’s content until it comes to its conclusion “I will rise up against them . . . and will wipe out of Babylon name and remnant, kith and kin . . .” [Isa. 14:22]. Isaiah similarly prophesied regarding Cyrus’ decree concerning Israel: “So says the Lord to Cyrus His anointed, whose right hand I strengthened” [Isa. 45:1], “He will build my city” [Isa. 45:13]. We find similarly in Daniel [5:30–6:1]: “During that very night Belshazzar the King was killed and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.” He reigned one year to complete the seventy years apportioned to the

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refer to Christendom, which they view as a continuation of the Roman empire.

sovereignty of Babylon.<sup>143</sup> During the first year of Cyrus' reign, the decree concerning Israel was issued and Israel came under the jurisdiction of the kingdom of Medea.

Afterwards, the kingdom of Greece arose, that is, Alexander the Macedonian, the three-year old goat and Daniel's *tzfir* 'izim.<sup>144</sup> He fought with the ram [Dan. 8:7], these being the kings of Medea, Darius the Persian, putting him to the sword, as it is written: "There was no one to rescue the ram from his power" [Dan. 8:7]. Israel, both those in Babylon and those in Jerusalem during the period of the second Temple, came under the rule of the king of Greece. The rule of the kings of Greece lasted one hundred and eighty years, as it states in the tractate *Avodah Zarah* [9a]. At that time war broke out between Greece and Rome, as our sages taught in *Avodah Zarah* [8b]: "The Romans engaged in thirty-two battles with Greeks and were not able to overcome them until Israel allied itself with Rome." Israel revolted against the Greeks during the period of the second Temple, coming under Roman authority and keeping faithful alliance with them for twenty-six years. Then the Romans turned against them, destroyed the second Temple, and the kingdom of Greece was subjugated by the Romans. Nor will the son of David come until the dominion of the kingdom of Rome spreads over the entire world for nine months, just as the other three kingdoms spread over the entire world. For this reason, our sages ordained the drinking of

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<sup>143</sup> See Megillah 12a.

<sup>144</sup> See p. 96 above.

four cups of wine,<sup>145</sup> corresponding to the four terms for redemption appearing in the pericope *Va'era* [Exod. 6:6–7], conveying the glad tidings to Israel that they will go forth from their subjugation to the four kingdoms.

I have written all of this because I have seen an interpretation in *Genesis Rabbah* in which the three-year old goat is correlated with the kingdom of Greece, with the two-horned ram appearing in Daniel [8:3] brought as corroborating evidence. This seems to me to be either a mistake or a case of scribal error, for it is clearly stated in Daniel that the two-horned ram represents the kings of Medea and Persia.

I have also seen someone dispute the words of our Sages and state that the fourth beast shown to Daniel represents the kingdom of Ishmael, for they have expanded throughout the majority of the inhabited world, their kingdom being great and widespread. They find it difficult to refer to Greece [and Rome] as representing two kingdoms when they really are one nation. Thus it states: “the offspring of Greece [*Yavan*] are Elisha, Tarshish and the Kittim” [Gen. 10:4]. The Kittim are the Romans. So we find in the first chapter of *Josippon*:<sup>146</sup> “And Sappho the son of Eliphaz ruled there.” If this is the case, the Greeks and the Romans constitute one people. All of this is found in his commentary to the Pentateuch and also at

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<sup>145</sup> On the eve of Passover, celebrating the first redemption but anticipating the last.

<sup>146</sup> The popular medieval Hebrew adaptation of Josephus’s *History of the Jews*.

the conclusion of the pericope Balak, concerning the verse: “Ships come from the quarter of Kittim” [Num. 24:24].

The essential interpretation is in accord with the words of our sages. Since the verse mentioned the kingdom of Babylon, it has already mentioned Ishmael, for Babylon stands at their head; all are under its dominion and conform to its discipline.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, although the Greeks and Romans constitute one ethnos, they are two distinct kingdoms, and in the past they engaged in war with one another. Similarly, the kings of Judah and Israel were one people who split into two kingdoms.

It is said in Daniel [7:25] concerning the fourth beast: “He will speak words against the Most High,” that is, he will say words that can not conceivably be said: “these are my words.”<sup>148</sup> “And he will harass the holy ones of the Most High” [Dan. 7:25]: Israel. This is the meaning of “in the presence of the vengeful foe” [Ps. 44:17]. “He will think of changing times and laws” [7:25]: in their interpretation and to change the law. “And they will be delivered into his hands for time, times and half a time” [Dan. 7:25]: that is to say that redemption will not come to Israel until “time, times and half a time.” As it is said: “the beast was killed . . . its body was destroyed and it was consigned to the flames” [Dan. 7:11]. It is written afterwards: “As I looked on in the night vision,”

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<sup>147</sup> Babylon equals Baghdad, the capital of Islam.

<sup>148</sup> This would seem to be Christianity’s appropriation of Jewish scripture. There has been considerable censorship of the manuscript in the following lines.

One like a human being  
Came with the clouds of heaven . . .  
Dominion, glory, and kingship were given to him  
All peoples and nations of every language must  
serve him [Dan. 7:13–14].

**[5:8] I adjure you O maidens of Jerusalem!  
If you meet my beloved, tell him this:  
That I am faint with love.**

All this is a parable concerning the ascent of the Glory,  
and the *shekhinah* complaining bitterly about his departure.

**[5:9] How is your beloved fairer than another,  
O fairest of women?**

From all of the seventy thrones of Kingship.

**[5:10] My beloved is clear skinned and ruddy,  
Preeminent among ten thousand.**

Our sages say in the Midrash to Canticles: “**My beloved is clear skinned and ruddy:** His appearance is ruddy, black, green, and white. Thus the appearance of the Holy One is like ‘the appearance of the rainbow which is within the cloud’ [Ezek. 1:28].”

**Preeminent among ten thousand:** Surrounding Him is the divine camp; myriad holy ones are about Him. He is distinguished among His hosts, is recognized among His camps. As our Sages said concerning Rabbi Akiba

when he entered the Orchard: “‘What did you see?’<sup>149</sup>  
‘The Lord of Hosts [*tzevaot*] is His name’ [Isa. 47:4]. He  
is distinguished [*ot*] amidst His Host [*tzeva shelo*].”<sup>150</sup>

**[5:11] His head is finest gold,  
His locks are curled,  
Black like a raven.**

**His head is finest gold:** All inclusive, crowned and  
endiademed.<sup>151</sup>

**His locks are black curls:** As the verse states: “He  
made darkness His screen; dark thunder heads, dense  
clouds of the sky were His pavilion round about Him”  
[Ps. 18:12]. For they constitute the beginning of the gen-  
eration of water. This is as the sages said in Exodus  
Rabbah [15:22]: “The waters engendered and birthed  
darkness.”

**[5:12] His eyes are like doves. . . .  
Bathed in milk,  
Set by a brimming pool.**

**His eyes are like doves:** “For the eyes of the Lord set  
about the whole earth” [II Chron. 16:9].

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<sup>149</sup> This variant reading is found only in the printed text.  
Alternatively: “What is the meaning of the verse.”

<sup>150</sup> b. *Hagigah* 16a.

<sup>151</sup> The following lines may be read as a progression through the  
*sefirot*, beginning here with *keter*, but the individual referents are kept  
somewhat murky.

**Bathed in milk:** And they are as pure as milk.

**Set by a brimming pool:** Situated by the dwelling places of perfection and beauty.

**[5:13] His cheeks are like a bed of spices,  
Banks of perfume,  
His lips are like lilies,  
They drip flowing myrrh.**

**His cheeks are like a bed of spices** The parable alludes to that illuminated countenance which no mortal may see and live. No mortal creature can attain satiety<sup>152</sup> from that illumination.

**Like a bed of spices:** This is wisdom, the countenances illuminated by the luminosity of Wisdom. Concerning this it is said: “In the light of the king’s countenance is life” [Prov. 16:14]. And it says: “May God shine His countenance upon you and deal graciously with you” [Num. 6:25].

**His lips are like lilies:** The six *sefirot* are directed by His word and the spirit of His mouth.

**They drip flowing myrrh:** These are the words of Torah which all nations and tongues acknowledge. It is like that goodly myrrh which passes from place to place and contains no impurity.

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<sup>152</sup> He seems to mean that no one could be sufficiently satisfied in order to *depart* from such a vision. For that reason “No man can see Me and live” [Exod. 33:20].

**[5:15] He is as majestic as Lebanon,  
Stately as the cedars.<sup>153</sup>**

In similar fashion Scripture states: “I am like a leafy cypress; your fruit comes from Me” [Hos. 14:9]. Souls are the fruit of the blessed Holy One. If Rava created a man,<sup>154</sup> he returned it to dust, for it contained no power of the soul.

**[6:2] My beloved has gone down to his garden,  
To the beds of spices,  
To browse in the gardens,  
And to pick lilies.**

**My beloved has gone down to his garden:** An all-encompassing entity does not differentiate between such distinctions as “above” and “below.” Descent is equivalent to ascent; ascent to descent. Because exile has caused it to be occulted amidst its sefirotic manifestations, Scripture refers to it as engaging in an act of “descent.”<sup>155</sup> Whence has it [descended] to the garden?

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<sup>153</sup> There follows a long quotation from *Sefer ha-Bahir*, Scholem’s sections 64, 67–69.

<sup>154</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 65b. The reference is to the primary Talmudic source for the later *Golem* tradition.

<sup>155</sup> A radically different and ironic reading. At the time of exile, the omnipresent divine “descends” as it were back into its recesses—the source of creative manifestation—divine Wisdom, from whence it must be reinvoked through prayer and the performance of the commandments.

**To the beds of spices:** That is to say, [from] transcendent Wisdom, the locus from which this aroma and emanative energy spread forth.

**To browse in the gardens:** To provide nurturance for itself and to pour forth its luminescence to the gardens and the *shekhinah*.<sup>156</sup>

**And to gather the lilies:** This is Thought, the luminescence of Wisdom flowing forth to the six cosmic boundaries [*ketzavot*]. All this takes place during the period of exile, a time bereft of festal offerings, sacrifices of thanksgiving and the meal offerings. The spiritual entities ascend and are drawn to that place from which they nurse. This is the meaning of: “on evil’s account, the righteous one dies” [Isa. 57:1].<sup>157</sup> For this reason, one must strive to invoke and emanate an outflow of blessing to the Fathers,<sup>158</sup> so that the sons too be imbued with emanative energy. In this verse this process of emanation and outpouring is referred to as “gathering.”

Our sages have likewise referred to the emanation of the *sefirot* and their revelation as an act of displacement [*akirah*]. It states in Genesis Rabbah [15:1]: “‘The Lord God planted a garden in Eden’ [Gen. 2:8]. As it is written: ‘Let the trees of the Lord be sated, the cedars of Lebanon, his own planting’ [Ps. 104:16]. R. Hanina said:

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<sup>156</sup> *Tiferet*, the Beloved, “descends” from *hokhmah*, bringing sustenance for Himself and *shekhinah*, His garden.

<sup>157</sup> Because of this cosmic exile, the *sefirot* turn “upward” and *tzaddik*, the righteous one [*yesod*] is not nourished by them.

<sup>158</sup> *Hesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferet*, symbolized by the Patriarchs.

‘They were like the antennae of locusts [*karnei hagavim*]. The Holy One uprooted them and replanted them in the Garden of Eden.’” Comprehend this wondrous statement. The planter must have in his hands a plantling. Similarly, the emanation and manifestation of the divine entities [*havayot*] was like an act of “displacement” while their creation and nurturance in their respective places was an act of planting. Those who plant “seedlings lovingly attended”<sup>159</sup> need to water them regularly. This is the meaning of R. Haninah’s statement. It states further in the Midrash: “Let the trees of the Lord drink and be sated” [Ps. 104:16]: “May their lives be sated; may their waters be sated; may their planting be sated.” The meaning here is that each sefirotic power receives its energy from the power above it, life drawing from the source of life, water from life, and the plantlings drawing from water. All this is intimated here. And it is also germane to the next verse which states:

**[6:3] I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine;  
he browses among the lilies.**

The meaning is that I receive from my beloved and my beloved, who browses among the lilies, receives [its energy] from transcendent Wisdom. Each and every sefirotic power ascends and “gazes” upon the power surmounting it, each attribute drawing forth from attribute, that which is carved out from that which is engraved, that which is engraved from that which is traced,

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<sup>159</sup> *Neta sha ‘ashuim*, after Isa. 5:7.

that which is traced from that which is concealed. All are within each other, all derive from each other, all are connected to each other and bound to one another.

**[6:4] You are as beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem.**

This entire verse constitutes a parable concerning Wisdom, and is to be read in accord with the principle which we enunciated at the book's beginning.

**[6:5] Your hair is like a flock of goats**

The text begins to relate the praises of the *shekhinah*, her hair, eyes, and brow: "Your brow behind your veil [gleams] like a pomegranate split open" [Cant. 6:6]. "Hedged around with lilies" [Cant. 7:3]: She encompasses the six cosmic boundaries and is sealed by them all. Thus the verse states "There are sixty queens . . ." [Cant. 6:8].<sup>160</sup>

[Here begins an excursus on Ps. 104. The commentary on the Song of Songs resumes on p. 129 below.]

I have decided at this point to relate the tale of creation in order to apprise you of the truth concerning this verse: "There are sixty queens." And I will expound: "O Lord my God, you are very great; You are clothed

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<sup>160</sup> "Lilies" [*shoshanim*] is derived from "six" [*shesh*]. Each of the six intermediate or "directional" *sefirot*, multiplied by ten for the fact that the *sefirot* all contain one another, gives us the "sixty queens."

with glory and majesty” [Ps. 104], which propounds the entire issue of creation from its beginning until its end. This is the gist of the psalm.

[104:2]: “You . . . are wrapped in a robe of light” corresponds to the light created on the first day of creation. That is, the emanation of that light from Nothing.

[104:3]: “He sets His rafters in the waters” corresponds to the command “Let there be a firmament” created on the second day to “separate water from water” [Gen.1:6]. The verse from Psalms clarifies that that separation encompassed many matters.<sup>161</sup>

[104:5]: “He established the earth on its foundations so that it shall never totter” parallels “Let the waters be gathered into one place and let dry land appear” [Gen. 1:9] and designates the length of time established for its existence.

[104:14]: “You make the grass grow for the cattle” parallels “Let the earth bring forth herbs . . .” [Gen. 1:11].

[104:19]: “He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows when to set” corresponds to the command “Let there be luminaries . . .” [Gen. 1:14].

[104:22–3]: “When the sun rises [the lions] come home and couch in their dens. Man then goes out to his work, to his labor until the evening” corresponds to “God made the two great luminaries” [Gen. 1:16].

[104:25]: “There is the sea vast and wide, with its creatures without number” corresponds to “Let the

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<sup>161</sup> I.e., water is separated from cloud and wind, the entire verse reading: “He sets the rafters of His lofts in the waters, makes the clouds His chariot, moves on the wings of the wind.”

waters teem with living creatures” [Gen. 1:20].

[104:31]: Paralleling the sixth day, on which it is said: “And God created the human being” [Gen. 1:27], it states: “May the glory of God endure forever.”

[104:32]: Corresponding to the seventh day of creation which points towards the seventh millennium when the world will be annihilated, it states: “He gazes upon the earth and it trembles.”

[104:33]: The joy experienced by the souls of the righteous during that time finds its intimation in “I will sing to the Lord with all my life force.”

[104:35]: Allusion to the nullification of the evil inclination during that period appears in “Sinners will disappear from the earth and the wicked will be no more.”

I will now proceed to explicate this psalm as well as expound upon the narrative of creation. And the enlightened will understand.

[104:1] “O Lord my God, You are very great”: The psalm alludes to the illumination of Wisdom, extending in every direction. From that flow, each Cause and attribute nurses like an infant.

“En clothed in glory and majesty”: So is Wisdom bounded. Never will we find Her in Your absence. Thus it was prior to the world’s creation, when the Holy One was alone in His world, when the primal existences [*havayot*] were still deeply hidden within Wisdom.

The text then explicates the manner of the creation of the two worlds, above and below.

[104:2]: “Wrapped in a robe of light; You spread the heavens like a tent cloth”: This denotes the invocation of Wisdom’s emanation enveloping the entirety of being. “Enwrapment” means that it receives illumination from that flow. Its amplification sparked a light which was among the ten entities emanated upon that first day, all as one, without differentiation. These are: heaven and earth; primeval chaos—formless and void, darkness and light, water and wind, the quality of day and the quality of night.<sup>162</sup>

And thus [Gen. 1:2 states]: “The world was chaotic, empty”: Chaos is an entity lacking all form; but primal Emptiness encloded that chaos, until it traced a tracing finer than spirit. “Darkness was upon the face of the deep”: The depth of the supernal heights, the depth below.<sup>163</sup> “And the spirit of God hovered over the waters”: The Messiah’s spirit, the spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, hovered over the waters, covering all. This is all that was emanated upon that first day.

The essence of all things was emanated upon the first day, just as our Sages taught concerning the primordial human: “In the first hour of the day the dust from which he

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<sup>162</sup> The author is linking the ten *sefirot* of the upper world to these ten attributes which, according to the Talmud [*Hagigah* 12a], underlay the creation of this world. They are heaven, earth, formlessness, void, darkness, light, water, wind, day, and night. This is one of several such lists of primordial entities to be found in rabbinic sources.

<sup>163</sup> The depth above: *omek rom* = *keter*; *omek tahat* = *malkhut*. See the Commentary of R. Azriel to *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:5.

was created was gathered together.”<sup>164</sup> When Scripture states: “Let there be light” [Gen. 1:3] its meaning is that Divinity enwrapped Itself in that light as we have explained, meaning that through the amplification of that luminescence, the light entered into a state of actualization.

In this first passage we find the word “light” five times, just as the phrase “it was good” appears five times. In the second passage the term “water” is repeated five times. Five were the drops of water, five were the drops of light in their midst. These were the five voices uttered at Torah’s revelation.<sup>165</sup> It is for this reason that Scripture states, “it was good,” for the light was kindled candle from candle, granting the primal essences the power to expand and flow forth.

“God separated the light from the darkness” [Gen. 1:4]: God set a boundary to the effluence and expansion of each and every one. This is the intent of “Let there be light and there was light” [Gen. 1:3], meaning “the speculum that shines.” “And there was darkness” [Gen. 1:2]: “the speculum that does not shine.”

Concerning both of them it said: “It was good.” This is the meaning of: “God called the light day, the darkness He called night” [Gen. 1:5]. He drew forth the effluence of the attribute of Day to daytime, the attribute of Night to nighttime. “And there was one day” [Gen. 1:5] all remained unified, in all of this the primal essence came to manifestation. Another interpretation: “There was

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<sup>164</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 38b.

<sup>165</sup> See comments to Canticles 1:8.

evening”: the speculum that does not shine. “There was morning”: the speculum which does shine. “One day”: unique and unified in His names.

[Ps. 104:3]: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters” [Gen. 1:6] parallels: “Who lays the beams of Your Upper chambers in the waters.”

“Let there be a firmament”: let the firmament expand into the midst of the waters, like the expansion of the soul into form. On the second day, God created the boundaries of space. For this reason, Scripture did not state “it was good” on the second day. For the work of the divine attribute of goodness remained incomplete. Such is the meaning of: “Let the firmament divide the waters from the waters.” The basic act of separation is this division into two: the upper waters and the lower waters. The upper waters are allegorically designated as male: the lower waters as female. This division works out in multifarious details. Consequently, Scripture states: “He builds His upper chambers in the heaven” [Amos 9:6]. For they are constructed as rungs upon rungs, as it is written: “For one higher above the higher, watches” [Eccles. 5:7]. All of these entities are traced, one within the other, each encompassing the other. Thus half of the waters are on high, half are below. So it is said: “Just as the *shekhinah* is above, is the *shekhinah* below.”<sup>166</sup>

Corresponding to this matter there are eighteen

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<sup>166</sup> This quotation is not found in the extant rabbinic sources.

thousand worlds.<sup>167</sup> As David the King states: “God’s chariots are myriads, even thousands upon thousands” [Ps. 68:18]. Having stipulated that God’s chariots are myriads, that is twenty thousand worlds, corresponding to ten *sefirot* above and ten below, he subtracts two thousand from their number, for they are the nought. All of the above is true. The worlds number twenty thousand. But two thousand are not included in the count, for they are Nought. Each and every world consists of a thousand generations. There are consequently eighteen thousand worlds. The primal essences originate in the mystery of Wisdom and its Cause. For this reason, it is fitting that the phrase “God said” appears but nine times in the narrative of Creation. The tenth is an allusion to the Nought. It appears in the phrase “In the beginning.” It is proper that it not be enunciated.

“Who makes the clouds His riding-mount”: The total of divisions wrought in the upper waters is seventy, excepting that at the center, which makes them seventy-one. Facing them are the lower waters, stamped in their image yet considered but one, leading to a total of seventy-two. This is the meaning of “clouds,”<sup>168</sup> as in “Behold the Lord rides upon a light cloud” [Isa. 19:1] or “Behold I come unto you in a dense cloud” [Exod. 19:9].

The seventy divisions are the five “voices” divided into seven directions, excepting the central one that gives stability to them all and is not one of them. Actually there

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<sup>167</sup> b. *Avodah Zarah* 3b.

<sup>168</sup> “Cloud [‘av] is numerically 72.

are six directions, each of them multiplied by ten. That is why “it was good” is said six times in the chapter on creation. This too is why Scripture speaks of “sixty queens” [Cant. 6:1] and “sixty warriors surround it” [Cant. 3:7]. All of this refers to a single matter, as we are to explain. Counting the seventh [central] direction also as ten, they make up seventy. Adding the innermost spiritual direction they are seventy-one. This is the totality of distinctions made on the second day.

Each setting of limits is in fact a division of space. Thus it says of man’s creation that in the second hour He “limited” him. This is like a person who is building up a ruined place; he needs to trace out where he will put the upper stories and the chambers. The building is completed by means of these divisions. That is why division exists.

“He walks upon the wings of the winds”: The blessed Holy One is revealed in and is raised up through the world. His footsteps are known through those attributes, just as the soul’s action is revealed through the body. This is the meaning of “God called the firmament heaven” [Gen. 1:5]. All the names are included in the word “heaven.” Thus Scripture says: “And you hear, O heaven” [II Chron. 6:27], “the Lord, God of heaven” [Neh. 1:8], “He who rides in heaven” [Deut. 33:26].

[Ps. 104:4]: “He makes the winds His messengers”: This alludes to the fact that the angels were created on the second day. These are His hosts on whose account He is designated the “God of hosts.” For they are neither replaced nor annihilated as are the other angels created on the fifth day, as we shall explain.

[Ps. 104:10]: “You make springs gush forth in torrents, they make their way between the hills” corresponds to “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, so that dry land may appear” [Gen. 1:9].<sup>169</sup> This is the preparation of the channels leading into the sea of Wisdom.<sup>170</sup>

[Ps. 104:5]: “He established the earth upon its foundations” indicates that the separation became truly distinct and visible. Therefore, it is in this place that the verse repeats “God saw that it was good” instead of on the second day. Just as our sages said concerning the creation of the primordial human, “God shaped his limbs in the third hour,”<sup>171</sup> similarly, it was on the third day “that dry land was seen” [Gen. 1:9]. For when the world existed as undifferentiated water<sup>172</sup> the land could not become visible. Paralleling the Genesis text is “He established the world on its foundations, so that it should never totter” [Ps. 104:5]. That is the time allotted it, one thousand generations. That is fifty thousand years, fifty years for a generation.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> The gathering of the waters and the appearance of dry land occurs on the third day of creation.

<sup>170</sup> *Malkhut*.

<sup>171</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 38b.

<sup>172</sup> Lit. *mayim be-mayim*, water within water.

<sup>173</sup> This alludes to the doctrine of *shemitot*, or cosmic sabbaths, claiming that the world goes through a series of seven-thousand year

[Ps. 104:6]: “You made the deep cover it as a garment”: The deep coexists with the world like a pot and its lid. Thus [the verse continues] “the waters stood above the mountains.” How were the waters gathered to one side? For you rebuked them “and they fled from your rebuke” [Ps. 104:7], as in: “The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over the mighty waters” [Ps. 29:3]. That is why it repeats the word: “Water, water.”<sup>174</sup>

[Ps. 104:8]: “They rise up to the mountains, flow down to the valleys, to that place You have assigned to them”: This refers to the ocean, as in “Let the waters be gathered to one place” [Gen. 1:9]. “God called the dry place ‘land’” [Gen 1:10] means that He drew forth the Will, which is the [upper] end of Thought, to the “dry place,” “dry” refers to that which does not bear fruit.<sup>175</sup> He drew to her this end of Thought, which is the totality of all the entities. Thus Scripture says: “Let the land bring forth grass” [Gen 1:11] and “Let the waters be gathered,” making channels through which the river then proceeds from Eden, flowing on the fifth day to water the garden. But for now those channels appeared as raw form

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cycles and then returns to its source.

<sup>174</sup> The repetition in Ps. 29:3 is not direct. There may be an allusion here to the tale of R. Akiva’s ascent to the *pardes*, as described in b. *Hagigah* 14b.

<sup>175</sup> He derives *‘erets* from *r-ts-h*, meaning “will.” *Keter* is extended to meet *malkhut*. The circle of the *sefirot* is thus closed.

[*golem*]; there was as yet no drawing forth. The channels were only preparations for the flowing springs.<sup>176</sup> Therefore it says:

[Ps. 104:10–11]: “He sends forth springs in the river-beds; they run between the mountains, giving drink to all the beasts of the field”: This refers to the well-known “beast,” the one who is also called “garden,” of which it says: “A river flows forth from Eden to water the garden” [Gen. 2:10].

[Ps. 104:11]: “The wild beasts quench their thirst”: The angels are thus called, those appointed to serve over matters of this world, as it is conducted. These are also “the young lions roar for prey” [Ps. 104:21]. And thus: “the gathering of waters He called seas” [Gen. 1:10]. He drew forth the central line, the one that nurses from the Source, like a spinal column drawing sustenance from the brain, into an attribute of day, passing through the cosmic Foundation, as in “all the rivers flow into the sea” [Eccles.1:6]. All the channels flow from the attribute of day to that of night by means of the cosmic Foundation.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> The *sefirot* as *kelim*, or the ordering of the sefirotic structure, “precedes” (better “underlies”) the actual flow of divine energy into these channels.

<sup>177</sup> *Tiferet*, the male energy of the central column, reaches into the heights of *keter*, the Will that is above the upper reaches of Mind, and flows down through *yesod*, its sexual manifestation, into *malkhut*, the “garden” or female.

[Ps. 104:12]: “Upon them dwell the birds of heaven”: Upon these two attributes; because of them, the ministering angels exist. “From amid the branches they give forth their voice”: The voices proceed from the seventy names, all of them deriving from the primal and innermost soft voice, the singular nation, parallel to the power of Israel, making seventy-one.

[Ps. 104:13]: “He gives the mountains drink from His upper chambers”: Because grasses and plants do not grow until the rain falls, it says: “He gives the mountains drink.” Right after this it says: “He causes grass to grow for the cattle; earth is sated by the fruit of Your deeds” [Ps. 104:14–15]. And where do they all come from? The “upper chambers,” which is to say “the fruit of Your deeds.” From the upper chambers, the glorious palaces which are the primal spiritual elements, come the forces that bring about rain for the world. This is the fruit of those “deeds,” for they are the cause of all being and non-being in the world, the cause of light and darkness. Of them are born the clouds<sup>178</sup> over the earth, from which the rain comes. The Land of Israel drinks of the innermost and purest of these, since it is parallel to the central column, the innermost, while the rest of the world drinks of them in diluted form. Of this Scripture says: “He builds His upper chambers in the heavens and founds His vault upon the earth; He calls to the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the earth” [Amos 9:6]. After mentioning the upper chambers, he speaks of the

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<sup>178</sup> Hebrew term obscure.

rain that comes about through them. Job too mentions first the primal causes and then the rain that comes about because of them: “He looks to the ends of the earth and sees beneath all of heaven, making a weight for the wind and measuring out the waters. He makes a decree for the rain and a way for the thunderstorm” [Job 28:24–26]. The rain is sent forth as a result of those primal causes. Of this Scripture says: “Depth calls unto depth by the sound of Your channels” [Ps. 42:8]. Understand this. The drops of rain are the drops of sexual coupling, coming from that which is without end [*eyn sof*].

Parallel to “Let the earth bring forth grasses” [Gen. 1:11], which sets out the pattern of all generation, it says here: “He causes grass to grow for the cattle” [Ps. 104:14–15]. After telling us that rain is sent forth as a result of those primal forces, he says that grasses and plants grow because of forces attached to those same primal entities, for there is no blade of grass below that does not have a power attached to it above by which it comes to be and grows, and for the sake of which it exists. The Psalm goes on to say:

[Ps. 104:15]: “Grass for man’s labors . . . wine to make man’s heart glad, and food to satisfy the heart”: The rain and the grasses that grow because of it are human food, and drinks bring us joy. So too: “May the trees of the Lord be sated, the cedars of Lebanon He has planted, there where the birds make their nests” [Ps. 104:16–17]. The mountain goats and rabbits up on the boulders and the high mountains, all sensate beings, need those primal entities which are the first source of the

entire birth process. How “may the trees of the Lord<sup>179</sup> be sated”? They are sated first from the Source of Life, giving of the overflow of their water to living creatures, both feeling and unfeeling. “The cedars of Lebanon that He planted” [Ps. 104:16] are those delicate entities, as we have explained. This is the meaning of “where the birds make their nests” [Ps. 104:17]. “The high mountains are for the mountain-goats; the boulders are hiding-places for rabbits” [Ps. 104:18]. Here it has been explained that everything draws life from those primal entities, nursing from those that emerged and appeared on the third day.<sup>180</sup> This was fixed in their nature as a primal and eternal desire. He placed their rule over the earth, that all creatures be attached to them and sustained by them, and in the end that all return to them. Of this it says here [on the third day] “And it was good.”

[Ps. 104:19]: Parallel to “Let there be lights” [Gen. 1:14], the Psalmist says: “He made the moon for fixed seasons.” The word “Let there be” indicates a drawing forth from Wisdom; therefore it is used in the account of creation only when referring to inward things:<sup>181</sup> light, firmament, luminaries. But of whatever was formless it says “Let there appear,” so that potential form or soul

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<sup>179</sup> Here “trees” and “cedars” are taken as symbols of the *sefirot*.

<sup>180</sup> The seven lower *sefirot* are born of *binah*, the third *sefirah*, or possibly referring to *tiferet*, the third of the seven upper “days.”

<sup>181</sup> *Sefirot*.

might appear in them.<sup>182</sup> So it is said of Adam, that in his fourth hour the soul-breath was cast into him. [The following line, having to do with the hiding of the light after seven days, and quoting Ps. 97:11, is quite garbled in the manuscript as well as the printed edition, and must be considered untranslatable. It may refer to the light of the seven sefirotic “days” transferred to the *shekhinah*.]

[Ps. 104:20]: “God made the two great lights, the greater light . . .” [Gen. 1:16]. He gave it dominion over those servants appointed to rule the night. Thus it says “You bring on darkness and it is night, when all the beasts of the forest stir.” This refers to the well-known “beast” who rules at night and the servants appointed over the night, who seek from her their appropriate role and tasks. These are “the young lions roar for prey, asking of God their food” [Ps. 104:21]. This means to draw it forth to them and lead them, so that which they are appointed over might exist. Of this it is also said: “She rises while it is yet night, giving food to her household and portions to her maidservants” [Prov. 31:15].

[Ps. 104:22]: “When the sun shines they return home, crouching in their dens”: This refers both to those who serve at night and to the one who rules over them.

[Ps. 104:23]: “Man goes forth to his work”: the attribute of day; “and to his work unto evening”: serving the attribute of night. That is why it says here “and it was

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<sup>182</sup> Hebrew obscure; translation conjectural.

good” [Gen. 1:18], for the lights were kindled to receive the power of the soul. Thus far the completion of the fourth day, including the attributes of day and night. It is said that all creatures are attached and bound to these, the source of all that they bring forth. These rule, as master rules over servant, one over the day and the other over the night. Thus the passage concludes: “How many are Your works, O Lord, You have made them all in wisdom,<sup>183</sup> the earth is filled with Your creations” [Ps. 104:24].

Now the Psalm begins to speak of how the divine will flows into all the secondary beings who were created in the sea of wisdom, of the completion of the structure through them, and of the further extension of those well-springs that had begun to flow into the sea of wisdom on the fifth day.

[Ps. 104:25]: Parallel to “Let the waters bring forth creeping things” [Gen. 1:20] it says: “There is the sea, vast and wide, its creatures beyond number, beings both small and great.” “The face of the cherub is like that of a man,”<sup>184</sup> the cherub being in the form of a little child. When it says “birds shall fly” [Gen. 1:20], it refers to the two cherubim which draw blessing forth, the attributes of south and north. Of these Scripture says: “Awake, O north,

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<sup>183</sup> Both *tiferet*, the sun or power of day, and *shekhinah*, the moon or power of night, rule by the power of *hokhmah*, source of the flow that animates them.

<sup>184</sup> b. *Hagigah* 13b.

and come forth, O south. blow your winds in my garden” [Cant. 4:16], as we have explained it. Once heaven and earth are doing their work, the power of these other two attributes is drawn toward them and added to them.

[Ps. 104:26]: “There go the ships”: those channels created on the third day. Of this it says: “She is like a merchant ship, she brings her food from afar” [Prov. 31:14]. She brings them through those channels, well-springs, and streams, and they flow into this sea and appear there.

“God created the great sea-monsters” [Gen. 1:21]: These are the four camps outside the *shekhinah* of the blessed Holy One, glorifying and exalting Him with words of song and praise. Of this it says “You created him to delight in him” [Ps. 104:26].

“And all the living creatures who creep” [Gen. 1:21]: This is the being with four faces, those of man, lion, ox, and cherub. Each of those faces itself has four faces and four wings, the wings spread out above the faces. Their appearance and their deeds have the appearance of fire. Within the red fire there is a black fire. This is the one spoken of in the [prophetic] tradition, where it says: “That is the being I saw beneath the God of Israel on the River Chebar, and I knew that they were cherubs” [Ezek. 10:22]. That is why the verse says: “which the waters caused to swarm forth after their kind” [Gen. 1:21]: They are [collectively] called “beast” [or “being”], for their bodies are joined but the faces are separate.<sup>185</sup> Therefore it says:

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<sup>185</sup> The author plays on the inconsistency of number in these texts.

“which the waters caused to swarm forth after their kind.”

“And each winged bird after its kind”: This refers to those angels created on the fifth day, for there are various rungs, some lower than others and some higher than others. There is a fire that pushes out fire and a fire that consumes fire. Some of them are from water, still others from air. The mission of each is in accord with its essence: the one sent on an errand of mercy is from water; the one who goes as an emissary of justice is derived from fire. Therefore no one angel is sent for both justice and mercy.

“God blessed them, saying: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, filling the land and the waters of the seas’” [Gen. 1:22]. As Scripture says, “Like entities in the full belly” [Eccles. 11:5], since water did not flow forth from wisdom until the sixth day, of which Scripture says “Let earth bring forth a living being after its kind” [Gen. 1:24]. The angels that were created on the fifth day are negated, just as the spark is reabsorbed into the coal, once they have sung their song. The reason [for their existence] is external to them and they are not sufficiently strong to stand before their Creator. They are incarnated a second time, sing their song, and then they disappear. Of this matter it has been said: “New each morning, great is Your faith!” [Lam. 3:23]. Here our Psalm continues: “All of them look to You to give them their food in its due time” [Ps. 104:27]. This refers to their flowing forth.

[Ps. 104:28–30]: “You give to them and they gather . . . when You hide Your face, they are terrified; when You take their breath, they die. Send Your breath and

they are created. . . .” All I have created is for your sake; that is why it says here: “it was good” [Gen. 1:21]. Thus it says of Adam, that in the fifth hour he stood up on his feet.

Of the sixth day Scripture says: “Let earth bring forth” [Gen. 1:24]. Let it bring forth all the generations, and with them the spirit of the first human came forth. Parallel to “God created man in His image” [Gen. 1:27], the completion of the structure, replete with its future implications and potentials, conducting it in such a way that each part is joined to the others, the Psalm says: “May the glory of YHVH be forever!” [Ps. 104:31]. For the name was not complete until Adam was created in God’s image. Only then was the seal complete, about which the prophet said to the prince of Tyre: “you are the seal of the account” [Ezek. 28:12]. He meant to say that you are on the rung of Adam, who completed the ten *sefirot*. The word *tokhnit* here means “account,” as in “a full account of the bricks” [Exod. 5:18]. Of this it says: “May the glory of YHVH be forever!”: a complete name spoken over a complete world.

“May YHVH rejoice in His creatures,” He caused the holy spirit to lie upon him, for he was crowned and adorned with the ten *sefirot*. So too it says of Adam that in the sixth hour he gave the creatures names. Here He concludes His words regarding the sixth day, sealing them with “it was good,” the name of God. Here the phrase is repeated a second time in the verse “God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good” [Gen. 1:31]. The word “very” refers to attachment to the Nothing, which is [the primal] good, that which brings

about the renewal of generations. Thus it said in the Torah scroll of Rabbi Meir: “and behold, death was good.”<sup>186</sup> For this reason too they established the blessing “who is good and does good”<sup>187</sup> to be recited in the house of mourning, for if one generation did not pass, no new one could come in its place.

The six extensions parallel the six days of the week and the six thousand times 365, the years of the world. The river that flows from Eden never ceases, and souls return and are reincarnated.

From here on the Psalmist is speaking of the seventh extension, which is something like the backbone in the human body, providing a basis for each of the six extensions. It is the blessed Holy One’s chamber of strength.<sup>188</sup> Of it *Sefer Yesirah* says: “The extensions have a holy place prepared in His place. The holy palace is placed at the center and it maintains them all.”<sup>189</sup> It is parallel to the Sabbath and to the seventh millennium, which is entirely Sabbath rest, life eternal. All souls cleave and are joined to the Throne of Glory: “there is no breaching and none goes out” [Ps. 144:14].

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<sup>186</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 9:5.

<sup>187</sup> b. *Berakhot* 46b.

<sup>188</sup> The seventh extension or direction is mysterious, beyond the six directions of space. It seems here to be the direction called “inward” or “innermost,” the center from which all the others radiate.

<sup>189</sup> *Sefer Yetsirah* 4:2.

This is the meaning of “Heaven and earth were completed, and all their hosts” [Gen. 2:1]. They were perfected and made into lovely and perfect vessels,<sup>190</sup> perfect in physical form, in structure, and in type.

“On the seventh day God completed the work that He had made” [Gen. 2:2]. He included within that central column all that he had wrought in the six extensions, indicating that the seventh day is the end of the flow which is the world’s existence, and thus that the world will be destroyed. “And He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had made” [Gen. 2:2]: Sabbath, the Holy Spirit amid the six extensions.

“God blessed the seventh day” [Gen. 2:3]: He blessed it above the other entities by an infusion of the Holy Spirit. This indicates also that in the seventh millennium all souls will be in the Bond of Life, delighting in it.

“And He called it holy, for on it He rested” [Gen. 2:3]: The power of soul was added to it, distinguishing it from all the other entities.

“That God had made” [Gen. 2:3]: Actions, including the calling forth of future generations. It further indicates that the entire seventh millennium, which parallels the seventh extension, is holy, without Satan and without the evil urge, as it says: “He called it holy.”

Thus there are three allusions to the seventh millennium: the destruction of the world, the delight of souls, and the negation of the evil urge. Parallel to the world’s destruction, David says in our Psalm: “He looks to earth

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<sup>190</sup> A play on words, reading *ve-yekhulu*, “were completed,” as derived from *keli*, “vessel.”

and it trembles; He touches the mountains and they smoke” [Ps. 104:32]. Of the delight of souls he says: “I will sing to the Lord as I live!” [Ps. 104:33]. “In [that millennium] there will only be the righteous seated and crowned. . . .”<sup>191</sup> There will be haloes about them of the clear light that hovers over the soul’s light. Of that great delight, the taste of which is unequaled, he says “as I live,” referring to life eternal, about which he further says: “I shall rejoice in the Lord” [Ps. 104:34]. This joy is the added Holy Spirit, basking in the light of *shekhinah* as it cleaves to the soul. Of the negation of the evil urge and the passing away of the spirit of defilement, he says: “Sins will vanish from the earth” [Ps. 104:35]. Of this the sages said: “David composed one hundred and three Psalms, but he did not say ‘Hallelujah’ until he saw the fall of the wicked,<sup>192</sup> meaning the negation of the evil urge. When David foresaw in the holy spirit the soul’s delight and its rest, he cried out ‘Praise the Lord. O my soul, Hallelujah!’”

[Here resumes the commentary on the Song of Songs:]

**[6:8] Sixty are the queens  
and eighty concubines,  
maidens without number**

**Sixty are the queens:** It is known that the emanation

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<sup>191</sup> b. *Berakhot* 17a.

<sup>192</sup> b. *Berakhot* 9b.

of both worlds took place at once. They are parallel to one another, facing one another. The World to Come has seven spatial extensions, of which Solomon in his wisdom said: "Wisdom has built her house, hewn out her seven pillars" [Prov. 9:1]. Of those the seventh is holy, the six being the six extensions, as we have explained. From these derive seventy names, standing within the twelve cosmic "arms."<sup>193</sup>

So too is this world sevenfold, divided into seventy nations which stand within those twelve directions. Below too, the central column is drawn forth as the holy one. It is Zion, as Scripture says: "From Zion, perfect in beauty, God appears" [Ps. 50:2]. This is what the sages meant when they said: "Whoever lives outside the land is like one who has no God."<sup>194</sup> Each people derives its power from the extension to which it is parallel, from which it has been drawn forth. Thus it must be that there are seventy nations. Deduct from these ten those that belong to the spiritual central line, the Land of Israel, of which it will not be said in the future: "they did not utterly destroy them" [Josh. 13:13]. All of them as one will be wiped away and will cease to exist, both from the world and from the Throne of Glory. They are the Kenite, the Kenizite, the Kadmonite, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite, the Girgashite, the Jebusite, and the Perizite. There thus remain sixty, of whom it says:

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<sup>193</sup> Sefer Yesirah 5:1 uses this term (based on Deut. 33:27) for twelve directions, a refinement of the original six.

<sup>194</sup> *Ketubut* 110b.

“Sixty are the queens.”

**And eighty concubines:** These are the chieftains of Esau, the princes of Ishmael, and the children of Keturah. They make up eighty.

**And maidens beyond number:** These are the countries and cities.

This is why the sages of Israel composed six orders [of Mishnah], parallel to the six extentions, comprising sixty tractates, parallel to the sixty queens. In the order called “Women” there are seven tractates, comprising seventy-one chapters. The Sanhedrin number seventy-one, since they are in charge of justice.<sup>195</sup> The rabbis said in the tractate Kiddushin:<sup>196</sup> “You do not check [for impurities in the family tree] beyond membership in the Sanhedrin. Why? Because it is taught that just as the court is pure with regard to its judgment, so is it pure of any other defect. Said Amemar: ‘What is the basis in Scripture? “You are entirely beautiful, my love; there is no defect in you” [Cant. 4:7].’” This means to say that they are like the *shekhinah*, which comprises seventy-one, and they have to be as free of any defect as She is.

The sages also said, regarding the verse “I have said, ‘How shall I place you among the sons and give you a land of delight?’” [Jer. 3:19], that this is like the tale of a king who had concubines and many children born of

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<sup>195</sup> The text may be assuming the special relationship, well known in later Kabbalah, between the female and *din* or “justice.”

<sup>196</sup> Kiddushin 76a.

them. He also had a single son from the queen, his wife, whom he loved very greatly. The king gave fields and vineyards to all the sons of the concubines. Then he gave his son but a single orchard, saying to him: “By your life! All my treasures are filled only by this orchard! Because I love you so much more than your brothers I have given it to you.”<sup>197</sup> Thus the blessed Holy One created the nations of the world, as it says: “Sixty are the queens and eighty concubines, maidens without number.” These are the nations.

**[6:9] One is my dove, my perfect one**

[This] refers to the community of Israel. God divided the world among the nations, giving them fields and vineyards, as Scripture says: “When the Most High caused the nations to inherit” [Deut. 32:8]. But to Israel He gave the Land of Israel, God’s own treasury. From it come the sacrifices, the shewbread, the first fruits, and all good things. Why so much? Because he distinguished between the son of the queen and the sons of the concubines. “I have said, ‘How shall I place you among the sons?’” [Jer. 3:19].

**[6:10] Who is this who appears [*ha-nishkafah*]?**

A reference to *shekhinah*, as Scripture says: “The Lord looked forth [*hishkif*] from heaven at the children of

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<sup>197</sup> Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 12.

man” [Ps. 14:2];<sup>198</sup> “Look forth [*hashkifah*] from Your holy dwelling” [Deut. 26:15].

**[6:11] I went down into the garden of nuts:**

*Shekhinah* says: “My eyes and heart are toward Israel, to see among them an enlightened person who seeks God.” This refers to the Second Temple period. Israel are compared to a nut because they are all responsible for one another.<sup>199</sup> Of this Scripture says: “They stumble, each over his brother” [Lev. 26:15]. Thus it was during the Second Temple: there were righteous and pious among them, but they were punished because of the audacious. Israel replied: “I do not know what my soul has done to me;” I myself caused “my people’s chariots to be given freely” [Cant. 6:12]. Those who behaved toward me with abusive power, the kings of Greece.<sup>200</sup>

**[7:1] Turn back, turn back,  
O maid of Shulem!  
Turn back, turn back,  
That we might gaze upon you.  
“How will you gaze at the Shulamite?  
In the Mahanaim dance.”**

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<sup>198</sup> *Shekhinah* is the power of providence, coming forth from “heaven” or *tiferet*.

<sup>199</sup> Nuts grow in clusters that cannot easily be separated.

<sup>200</sup> The text is somewhat obscure, but seems to mean that Israel, because of the way they related to one another, brought upon themselves the Seleucid oppressor.

**Turn back, turn back, O maid of Shulem! Turn back, turn back that we might gaze upon you:** The *shekhinah* says: “If Israel returns in penitence, then we will gaze upon you, we will see you in joy and honor.” Israel replies: **How will you gaze at the Shulamite? In the Mahanaim dance:** As in a dance performed together by two camps [*mahanot*]: the Glory and the *shekhinah* of His power. This means that He will cause the Presence to dwell in your midst.

**[7:2] How lovely are your feet in sandals, O daughter of nobles!**

The verse continues to array the praises of the *shekhinah*.

**[7:6] A King is held captive in your tresses. . . .**

This refers to the intimacy [*kirvah*] of Glory to Glory and her unification.

The [sefirotic] form is likened to a palm tree [Cant. 7:8], in image and in parable, a tree that unites the male and female within it, possessing one body and two branches. We have received this interpretation from the mouth of an enlightened kabbalist.

**[7:9] I say: Let me climb the palm,  
Let me take hold of its branches;  
Let your breasts be like clusters of grapes,  
Your breath like the fragrance of apples.**

**I say: Let me climb the palm:** Israel said:

“Although sin has caused separation [between God and myself], I planned to ascend to greatness through the merit of the *shekhinah* who is compared to a palm tree.”

**Let me take hold of its branches:** With our hands we will grasp hold of its deeds and merits.

**Let your breasts be like clusters of grapes, your breath like the fragrance of apples:** The locus of her nursing [*yenikah*] is like the grape cluster, for you receive illumination and outpouring of emanation from the source, Wisdom.

**Your breath like the fragrance of apples:** The simile refers to her receiving [the energy of emanation] from the two cherubim.

**[7:10] And your mouth is like the choicest wine.**

**Let it flow to my beloved as new wine**

**Gliding over the lips of sleepers.**

**And your mouth is like the choicest wine:** Your words are nothing less than an advocate, championing the cause of Israel before the Glory, giving expression to the lips of the sleepers—these are Israel in their exile.

**[7:12] Come my beloved,**

**Let us go into the field. . . .**

**Come my beloved:** The *shekhinah* said to the Glory, after the decree of Israel’s exile was enacted: “Why do you stand afar, and ascend to the uttermost heights?”

**Let us go to the field:** Do not remove your presence from me. Here in my exile are sages, expounders of Torah, houses of prayer and houses of study. This is the

meaning of vineyards, blossoms, pomegranates and mandrakes.

**[8:1] If only you could be like my brother,  
As if you had nursed at my mother's breast:  
Then I could kiss you  
When I met you in the street,  
And no one would despise me.**

**If only you could be like my brother:** The Glory responded: "If you desire and yearn for me to join myself to you, 'so will all of my desire be directed towards you' [Ps. 38:10], that you might be a brother to me and that I might not be separated from you."

**As if you had nursed at my mother's breast:** You would receive your nurturance from the place of my suckling, that is the spirit of the living God.<sup>201</sup>

**When I met you in the street:** When I find you during the period of exile, all of my desire and will is that you be with them in their suffering.

**Then I could kiss you:** You would adhere to me.

**[8:2] I would lead you, I would bring you  
To the house of my mother,  
Of her who taught me.  
I would let you drink of the spiced wine. . . .**

**I would lead you:** I would raise you to my Holy of Holies [*dvir ha-kodesh*] and to my sanctuary. That is **to**

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<sup>201</sup> Most likely *hokhmah* as *ruah hayyim*.

**the house of my mother, who taught me.** The soul can not reveal its activities without the body and the body possesses no capacity for action without the soul. So too the Holy One, blessed be He, reveals His awesome deeds and signs by means of His attributes.

**I would let you drink . . . :** This is a parable referring to the provision of the transcendent light from which the parents and children<sup>202</sup> are blessed together.

**[8:3] His left hand was under my head**

The language is in third person, referring to the Glory, who doesn't descend but rather ascends.

**[8:4] I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem:  
Do not wake or rouse  
Love until it please!**

**I adjure you . . . :** These are the words of the *shekhinah* during the time of exile, adjuring Israel not to force the coming of the End and not to arouse love until the time of favor arises. The verse does not stipulate either by the gazelles or hinds of the field [Cant. 2:7], for the *shekhinah* is not in her place.

**[8:5] Who is she that comes from the desert,  
Leaning upon her beloved?**

**Under the apple tree I roused you,**

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<sup>202</sup> The *sefirot* and Israel below.

**It was there your mother conceived you,  
There she who bore you conceived you.**

**Who is she who comes up from the desert?:** This is the tenth of the ten journeys which the *shekhinah* undertook. As our Sages said: “The *shekhinah* undertook ten journeys when she departed the Temple: from the altar cover to the cherub, from the cherub to the threshold of the Temple, from the threshold to the court, from the court to the altar, from the altar to the Temple roof, from the roof to the wall, from the wall to the city, from the city to the mountain, from the mountain to the wilderness. From the wilderness she ascended and dwelt within her place as it is written: ‘I will go and return to my place’ [Hosea 5:15].”<sup>203</sup>

**Yearning for her beloved:** Yearning for and bemoaning her beloved’s separation from her.

As for the text’s statement, **under the apple tree I roused you**, this parable refers to the Cherub of the Left Side, that is the locus of the beginning of form. The usage “roused you” alludes to the intimacy and the awakening of love during the time when Israel are present in their land, performing the will of the Omnipresent, as our Sages said: “One verse states: ‘Their faces were directed towards each other’ [Exod. 25:20]. The other verse stipulates: ‘they were standing up facing the House’ [II Chron. 3:13]. There is no contradiction here. Their countenances face each other when Israel are performing God’s will. Their faces are directed towards

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<sup>203</sup> Rosh ha-Shanah 31a.

the House when Israel are not performing God's will."<sup>204</sup>

**It is there your mother conceived you:** The spirit of the living God.

**There she who bore you conceived you:** The spiritual entities [i.e., the *sefirot*]. Given that we had been intimate and had aroused love, having been emanated from a single place, she said:

**[8:6] Place me like a seal upon your heart,  
Like the seal upon your arm. . . .**

**Place me like a seal:** When we separate during the time of exile, place me like that well known seal.

**Like the seal upon your arm:** Which corresponds to the heart, as our Sages said: "Whence do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He wears phylacteries?"<sup>205</sup>

**[8:7] If a man offered all of his wealth for love,  
He would be laughed to scorn.**

**If a man offered all of his wealth for love:** All of his heart, soul, and might.

**For love:** To adhere to the *shekhinah*.

**He would be laughed to scorn:** They will publicly offer him splendor and majesty,<sup>206</sup> his head lifted in

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<sup>204</sup> Baba Batra 99a.

<sup>205</sup> In *Berakhot* 6a.

<sup>206</sup> The word *buz* is interpreted to mean "loot" or "bounty" rather than "scorn."

honor, and he will ascend to the highest level to be favored and accounted among those who receive the countenance of the divine Presence.

**[8:8] We have a little sister,  
Whose breasts are not yet formed,  
What shall we do for our sister  
When she is spoken for?**

**We have a little sister:** The parable refers to Israel in exile, despised and degraded.

**Whose breasts are not yet formed:** They have no place to nurse since they have left the land of life and are separated from the place of Torah. As it is written: “Torah shall go forth from Zion, God’s word from Jerusalem” [Isa. 2:3]. Concerning the exile it is said: “For many days Israel will be bereft of the God of truth and Torah” [II Chron. 15:2].

**What shall we do for our sister when she is spoken for?:** What shall we do for them? How shall we sustain them? How to provide them with a future, with hope in their exile?

**[8:9] If she be a wall,  
We will build upon it a silver battlement,  
If she be a door,  
We will panel it in cedar.**

**[8:10] I am a wall,  
My breasts are like towers.  
So I became in his eyes,  
Like one who found favor.**

**If she be a wall, we build upon it a silver battlement:** If she stands up to her enemies who entice her to deny her faith, **we will build upon it a silver battlement:** The parable indicates that no mortal will overcome them.

**If she be a door:** Which is easily opened, they similarly might be easily seduced, then even if **we will panel [natzor] it in cedar**, in accord with: “build a siege-work [matzor], the enemy will fight them and overcome them” [Deut. 20:20].

The Community of Israel answers, **I am a wall and my breasts are like towers:** She takes pride that she will be like a fortified wall, holding firmly to her faith in the two Torahs, written and oral, which are an individual’s vitality, just as the breasts provide vitality to the infant.

“Then,” she says, “I will appear in God’s eyes **like one who finds favor.**”

**[8:11] Solomon had a vineyard**

**In Baal-hamon,**

**He had to post guards in the vineyard:**

**A man would give for its fruit**

**A thousand pieces of silver.**

**Solomon had a vineyard:** To Him who is the possessor of peace, Israel is designated as His vineyard, as it says: “For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel” [Isa. 5:7] and “I the Lord keep watch over it” [Isa. 27:3].

**In Baal-hamon:** The parable refers to the people, great, splendid, and numerous. But as a result of her sin, God gave her to the nations of the world.

**A man would give for its fruit:** They put both the bodies and material resources of Israel to hard labor.

**A thousand pieces of silver:** An allusion to the days of exile, the text not paying precise attention to those few years of our exile which extend beyond one thousand.<sup>207</sup>

**[8:12] I have my very own vineyard:**

**You may have the thousand, O Solomon,  
And the guards of the fruit two hundred!**

**I have my very own vineyard:** I will bring them forth from exile and they will be under My supervision as in the beginning.

**You may have the thousand, O Solomon!:** Solomon here possesses a secular meaning, referring to the House of David. What is intimated here is that the days of the Messiah will last a thousand years, this being the sixth millennium of the world's existence, which will extend for six thousand years.

Two hundred years out of this millennium belong to **those who guard its fruit:** to those meriting the reward of the study of Torah and the observance of its commandments who had died previously and had yearned for the coming of the Messianic consummation and the resurrection of the dead. That is to say that the resurrection of the dead will occur two hundred years after the redemption. Thus in the sixth millennium, two hundred years before the resurrection of the dead, redemption and salvation will be revealed.

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<sup>207</sup> The sixth millennium, thought by many to be the end of exile, began in 1240, shortly before the completion of this commentary.

**[8:13] O you who linger in the gardens,  
A lover is listening. . . .**

Thus it states **who lingers in the gardens**: This is the *shekhinah* who is of the Central Column.

**A lover is listening . . .** : This is Israel who listen for your voice to gather their exiles, when you shall go forth before them as in the past. It is known that the ten tribes were exiled forty years before Judah and Benjamin. These underwent exile in three waves, as it is written: “for the first time brought abasement to the land of Naphtali and Zebulun while the later time was severe” [Isa. 8:23]. This is clarified in *Seder ‘Olam*, based on the verses. Judah and Benjamin also underwent exile in three waves, as it is written: “You walked in your sister’s path; therefore I will place her cup in your hands” [Ezek. 23:31]. And so it is clearly explicated in the verse.

Those who first went forth into exile will be the first to return. Some time later, the children of Judah will return. So Isaiah prophesied when he said: “In that day my Lord will apply His hand a second time to redeem the other part of His people from Assyria—as also from Egypt, Pathos, Nubia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the coastlands” [Isa. 11:11]. The verse specifies “a second time,” for the redemption of the ten tribes will come first. And thus “the other part of His people” who will have remained in Assyria. In the following verse Isaiah lists the two exiles and makes mention of the two acts of redemption, referring to each and every one with its proper name. He says: “He will hold up a signal to the nations and assemble the banished of Israel; and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” [Isa. 11:12].

He refers to the ten tribes as the “banished of Israel” as they dwell together but are banished from their land. The exile of Judah is designated as a dispersion, “and he will gather the dispersed of Judah.” The house of Israel will anoint a Messiah called Messiah ben Joseph; he will conquer lands and kingdoms and go to Jerusalem and rebuild it, as it is written: “The Lord builds Jerusalem, He gathers in the dispersed of Israel” [Ps. 147:2]. But he will die in battle. Of him it states: “In that day, the wailing in Jerusalem shall be great” [Zach. 12:11] and “they shall lament to Me about those who are slain” [Zach. 12:10]. Afterwards, the dispersed and scattered among the nations shall come and appoint a single leader, the Messiah, son of David, who was with them in exile. They will come to the Land of Israel with the permission of the kings of the nations and with their assistance. As it is written: “And out of all of the nations, said the Lord, they shall bring all your brothers on horses, in chariots and drays, on mules and dromedaries to Jerusalem, My holy mountain, as an offering to the Lord” [Isa. 66:20]. This kingdom will continue and never end. This is the meaning of “Thus declares the Lord God, Who gathers the banished of Israel” [Isa. 56:8]: these are the ten tribes. “I will gather still more to those already gathered” [ibid.]: I add yet another gathering to the first, the dispersed of Judah. This is the meaning of “The Lord your God will restore your exile and have mercy upon you. He will return and gather you from among all the nations among whom He scattered you” [Deut. 30:3]. It is possible that there may be a substantial period of time between these two ingatherings. Afterwards they might yet have to be as herdsmen in the wilderness of the nations, in order to separate out and

purify the wicked among Israel, and to smelt them just as silver is smelt in the refining furnace, as happened during the Exodus from Egypt. . . .<sup>208</sup>

**[8:14] Flee, my beloved**

**[And be like a deer on the mountain of spices]**

By means of the holy spirit he looked forward and prophesied concerning the seventh millennium, the day that is entirely Sabbath and rest, for life eternal. Souls will be bound up in the bond of life and they will be a throne for the Lord. Then the river which is the life and existence of the world, flowing forth from the Eden of Wisdom, will cease its flow. This is the meaning of **Flee, my beloved**: pointing to the rising of the Glory, its ascent into the upper light.

**And be like a deer on the mountain of spices:** That is a place containing all beings, filled up with all bodies, wondrous in counsel, entering all those heights. May I deserve to be counted among those who make less of themselves; “after two days may He quicken us” [Hos. 6:2] to see the glory of Jerusalem, when the moon’s light is bright as the sun, and the sun has sevenfold its light. Thus Scripture has foretold: “The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, like the light of the seven days, on the day when the Lord binds up the bruise of His people, and heals the stroke of their wound” [Isa. 30:26].

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<sup>208</sup> An eschatological discussion of Zech. 9:9 etc. has been ellipted.

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## II

### ***Zohar Hadash: Commentary on Lamentations***

#### **Introduction**

When speaking about the Kabbalistic interpretation of Scripture and its place within the fourfold Jewish understanding of Scripture in the Middle Ages, the logical starting point would seem to be that of Kabbalistic notions of Scripture and the art of its interpretation. But sometimes neither reality nor pedagogy conforms to our standard notions of logic—particularly the case when dealing with mystical matters. In the world of Kabbalah we often have to commence with *aggadah* and its re-reading of Scripture rather than with the Bible itself. Medieval Judaism, in all its forms, is a rabbinic religion. This means not only that the Biblical text is authoritative but also that the text as understood by the rabbis of the Talmudic period is the authoritative reading of Scripture. This authority of text-as-received through the rabbinic filter is most applicable to the realm of *halakhah* or religious praxis, but has some validity in the parallel realm of *aggadah* or theological narrative as well.

Of course medieval Jewish exegetes have rediscovered the *peshat*, simple or literal reading of Scripture.

Influenced by the Arab grammarians and new trends in Qur'an exegesis, Hebrew scholars from the tenth century began to set aside the rabbinic readings in order to dig out what they thought were the original meanings of Biblical texts. Even so deeply rabbinic a writer as RaSHI (Rabbi Solomon Itshaki (1040–1105), the best-known Jewish commentator, could sidestep rabbinic tradition with such a phrase as: “but I seek nought but the plain meaning of Scripture.”

Nevertheless, the rabbinic readings (in the plural, to be sure, since midrashic exegesis is by nature polysemous) retained great currency, and the medieval Jewish imagination was often constructed around them. This is especially true for Kabbalah, a tradition deeply formed by and engaged in fervent dialogue with the values, symbols and concepts of the rabbinic tradition. The great classic of Kabbalah, the Zohar, is a pseudoepigraphic midrash purporting to be the words of second century sages. When Kabbalists move from the open exegesis of authentic rabbinic sources to the creation of their own midrashic hermeneutics, they see themselves as literally reopening the wells of aggadic creativity and reanimating the process of Oral Torah.

The enormous devotion to Oral Torah in Kabbalistic circles is in part due to the fact that Oral Torah is identified with “Our Lady the *shekhinah*,” the feminine component of divinity toward whom the Kabbalists saw themselves as having a special devotion. But it is also due to the fact that Kabbalah really reflects a rebirth of the aggadic process. There is much in the Zohar that follows directly in the rabbinic line of Scriptural readings,

comprehensible even without reference to the sefirotic grid of symbols that makes for Kabbalah itself. The world of the Zohar is an attempt to re-create the world of the Tannaim. This includes the narrative portions of the text, recounting alleged wanderings of the early rabbis and referring to (mostly fictional and often newly invented) events in their lives. But it is true of the homiletical sections as well: every page is woven out of allusions to and dialogue with the Talmudic tradition, not as hoary and ancient source but rather as a living, contemporary reality and conversation partner. There are no borders between the midrashic page and the Zoharic dialogue. There is an intertextual conversation here that we are only beginning to chart, but one that has a unique complexity: the Kabbalist encounters Scripture through the veil of a rabbinic reading that he seeks to become a part of and revivify, while also uncovering within both prior corpuses those elements that will become the foundations of his own new enrichment of the discourse in the form of properly Kabbalistic exegesis.

The medievals' dialogue with the Rabbis is not always an easy one. Among the philosophical exegetes we are familiar with great discomfort with elements of *aggadah* and its readings of the Bible. Some of this discomfort was apologetic in nature: both Christian and Karaite writers had long mocked the rabbis' fanciful readings of shared Scriptures. But philosophically sophisticated readers were also undoubtedly genuinely disturbed by some of the extremes of rabbinic anthropomorphism, to say nothing of such "shocking" quasi-rabbinic traditions as merkavah mysticism and especially *shi'ur komah*. This was significantly less true

for the Kabbalists than for their philosophic rivals. Kabbalists share far more with the rabbis than the philosophers do; they are more comfortable with much of the conceptual world and idiom of rabbinic discourse, including the rabbinic world's highly personal and even anthropomorphic sense of the divine, its mythic worldview, and its delight in the miraculous. Although Kabbalah itself may be seen as a systematic theosophy and cosmology, the Zohar mostly sets aside presentation of this grand system, accepting the typically Jewish and rabbinic valorization of narrative over analytical theological discourse.

But there remain moments when the encounter with the rabbis is not an easy one, when rabbinic texts can disturb and even appall the Kabbalists. Sometimes they find that they cannot accept a particular trajectory within the rabbinic tradition. Then they devote their considerable literary and theological skills in part to deflect it, hoping to find a solution to a burning theological problem when a rabbinic response seems to be absolutely unnerving. Sometimes classical Jewish theology, rooted in Scripture as understood exoterically, paints the Sages into a corner and thus requires radical reformulation; here the new Kabbalistic readings may be brought in *against* the rabbis, a counter-tradition purporting to uncover a deeper meaning of Scripture that can help us out of the bind created by earlier readings.

This is very much the case regarding the issue of theodicy, one of the core concerns of the Kabbalistic tradition, the key subject of the text before us. This section of the Zohar needs to be read in the context of a comparative analysis of midrashic and Zoharic responses

to the Book of Lamentations, reflecting the two great tragedies of 586 BCE. and 70 CE., already quite homologized into one by the rabbinic sources. Here we see a zoharic text as much engaged in polemic as it is in dialogue. Hopefully an understanding of this will take us beyond the text at hand, serving as a window into the incredible complexity of the world created by the zoharic imagination.

A much later Kabbalist, R. Solomon Shlomi of Dresnitz, a keen-eyed participant/observer of the Safed revival of Kabbalah in the sixteenth century, recounts a story about R. Abraham b. Eliezer ha-Levi Berukhim (ca. 1515–93), who had a vision of the *shekhinah* as Mother Rachel or Mother Zion, draped in black and in mourning for Zion, projected upon the Western Wall. The fact that he sees her at that holy place is in harmony with the words of R. Aha: “Never has the *shekhinah* departed from the Western Wall of the Temple: as it is written: ‘Here she stands behind our latticework’ [Cant. 2:9].”<sup>209</sup> But it is most unlikely that R. Aha would have called an apparition in feminine form by the term *shekhinah*. The association of *shekhinah*, the indwelling presence of God in the world, with the feminine images of Community of Israel, Mother Zion, and so forth, is specifically a Kabbalistic innovation.

R. Abraham’s vision is a powerful expression of the exegetical construction of reality depicted in the zoharic accounts of the *shekhinah*’s midnight lament that we have before us. This zoharic text is completely rooted in one set of traditions in rabbinic theodic texts—the image

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<sup>209</sup> Midrash Tanhuma, *shemot* 10.

of the weeping and lamenting God—but also strikes me as an attempt to defuse the anger permeating certain strata of Lamentations Rabbah. That anger is directed towards a notion of the divine and divine justice which the Sages themselves find abusive, and against which they are in rebellion. The fierce outcry against divine injustice is a key component of the Lamentations Rabbah tradition, and one that carries over into later Jewish attitudes, reflected so strongly, for example, in the poignant elegies written in response to the First Crusade. By picking up on a different strand of rabbinic tradition, the Zohar is attempting to carry forth an alternative conception of divine justice, one founded upon the notion of divine exile and suffering. The powerful descriptions in the following passage of *shekhinah*'s mourning should be read as an attempt to restore credibility to the notion of divine goodness and compassion—and thus to provide Israel hope for its future.

This passage is a section from the work entitled *Zohar Ḥadash* by the Kabbalists who collected it for the edition of Salonika, 1597. *Zohar Ḥadash* is a collection of sources, mostly by the author(s) of the original Zohar, that had been left out of the earlier (1558–60) Zohar editions. Despite its later appearance, this introduction and commentary on the opening verse of Lamentations is considered by scholars to belong to the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* (“Hidden Midrash”) stratum of the Zohar.

This introduction is by Seth Brody, edited from his notes.

—A.G.

## **The Hidden Midrash to the Book of Lamentations**

I. The inhabitants of Babylon sent this missive to the inhabitants of the Holy Land:

Weeping befits us,  
Eulogizing becomes us,  
for the destruction of God's house,  
since we are dispersed amongst the nations.  
Thus, we should be the first to lament,  
we should be the first  
to explicate the puzzle  
which the World's Master has sent  
to bewail the destruction of His House.

The inhabitants of the Holy Land responded, sending this missive to the Babylonians:

It is surely right for you  
dispersed among the nations,  
outside the borders of the Holy Land,  
to bewail yourselves.  
For you have gone forth  
from light to darkness,  
like a servant who has departed from his master's  
house.  
But it is we who should weep,  
we who should eulogize,  
for the Blessed Holy One has sent us  
the Book of Lamentations.

It is we who are the children  
of the Mistress divine;  
we the members of her household,  
who know the glory of World's Master.  
Thus weeping befits us,  
and it is we  
who should explicate this puzzle.  
For we are orphans,  
lacking father and mother.  
Our eyes gaze towards the walls  
of our Mother's house  
which is destroyed  
and we are incapable  
of finding her.  
In former days  
she nursed us  
from the radiance of her beauty,  
she comforted us  
and spoke to our hearts,  
like a mother to her child.  
As it is written:  
"As a mother comforts her son . . ." [Isa. 66:13].  
Now our eyes gaze in all directions,  
and the place of our mother's house  
is overturned and destroyed.  
Stomped to their foundations  
are the walls of her house and dwelling place.

Who then will comfort us?  
Who then will speak to our hearts  
and protect us before the King?

When we had sinned against our father,  
and the strap thrashed out to whip us,  
she stood before us  
and received the King's lashing,  
defending us.

As it is written:

“He was wounded on account of our sins,  
crushed because of our iniquities . . .  
by his bruises we were healed” [Isa. 53:5].

Alas, now we no longer have a mother.  
Woe for us!  
Woe for you!

Weeping becomes us!  
Lamentation befits us!  
It is our place to explicate  
those words of bitter grief  
to teach those who know how to wail  
the language of lamentation.  
For every day we approach  
the bedchamber of our mother  
but find her not.  
We inquire for her  
but none pay us heed.  
We inquire of her bed—  
it is overturned.  
We ask of the throne—  
it is fallen.  
We ask her chambers.  
These state that they know

nothing of her.  
We ask of the dust.  
The imprint of her foot is not found there.

We inquire of the Temple roof.  
The roof answers us  
that she stood upon it,  
crying and keening.  
Departing,  
she cried for us,  
voice embittered,  
moving from rooftop  
to rooftop.  
As it says:  
“What can have happened to you  
That you have gone, all of you, up on the roof . . .”  
[Isa. 22:1].

We inquire of the roadways and boulevards.  
All of them declare  
that they heard an embittered cry,  
bewailing her children.  
But they know not  
whereto she ascended.

Wailing befits us.  
Lamentation becomes us.  
We will kiss the dust of her feet.  
We will kiss her dwelling-place,  
we will kiss her chamber’s walls  
and we will wail bitterly.

We will commence the lamentation  
for every day we view this destruction.  
With constancy shall we keen.  
The bitterness of weeping will not  
cease among us.

They commenced their discourse and said:

Alas!  
Lonely sits the city  
Once great with people! [Lam. 1:1].

It is written:  
“a day of tumult and din and confusion—  
like the crowing of Kir, and Sho ‘a at the mount”  
[Isa. 22:5].

The blessed Holy One possesses one day,  
the beloved of His soul,  
encompassing all of the other days.  
The six other days are enveloped within it.  
It is the sum of them all.  
But when sinfulness abounds within the world,  
it ascends above,  
to the place of World of Life.

Then, from under the trains of the Sanctuary,  
a day of bitterness arises,  
a day of wailing,  
a day of suffering,  
named “tumult, din and confusion.”

It enters the Sanctuary,  
destroys and defiles.  
The Master of the Sanctuary  
departs, leaves,  
is driven out of His dwelling,  
out to the mountain beyond,  
into the mount of destruction.  
The Sanctuary is defiled and destroyed.

Afterwards,  
that supernal day which had ascended,  
alights  
and inquires after its dwelling place.  
He finds it destroyed.  
He enters and looks for  
the Sanctuary's masters,  
the Lady his soul's beloved.  
She is banished, expelled.  
The entire edifice  
is overturned.  
Then he begins to low,  
bellow after bellow,  
like a cock for its mate.  
It is so written:  
"like the crowing of Kir, and Sho 'a at the mount"  
[Isa. 22:5].  
"Kir" designates a ruler, dominance.  
"Sho 'a at the mount":  
He cries for help [*shav 'ah*]  
and calls out towards that mountain  
to which the divine Lady had departed.

Crying he calls out:  
 “Alas!  
 Woe is my soul’s beloved!  
 Woe is my pearl,  
 my perfect one.  
 Woe is my only love,  
 secreted with me in unity.  
 Woe is she  
 who daily absorbed  
 the twenty-five letters of unity  
 and was named ‘Koh,’ [twenty-five]  
 on that account.  
 Sister!  
 Daughter!  
 Mother!  
 Where have you gone?  
 In what direction have you departed?  
 We daily hear this, our master’s lowing.  
 Is it not fitting that we cry?  
 Is it not proper that we lament?  
 Is it not right that we open our discourse with  
*Aikhah*—  
 “Alas, where is  
 Koh?”<sup>210</sup>  
 “Alas!  
 Lonely sits the city  
 Once great with people!”

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<sup>210</sup> *Aikhah*, the opening word (and Hebrew name) of Lamentations, is read as a word (*Ei*) and an abbreviation (*KoH* = 25) to mean “Where is twenty-five?”

Rabbi Levitas the Seer opened his discourse:  
“I will place enmity between you and the woman,  
between your offspring and hers” [Gen. 3:15].

From the day upon which the world was created,  
enormous was the enmity that arose  
on account of the counsel of that serpent.  
From the hour in which it was cursed  
it was thrust away from the gate of the King.  
But like a steady sojourner  
it loitered among the boundaries of the world,  
the boundaries of the Torah.  
Anyone who trampled upon those boundaries  
was bitten by that serpent.

Woe to the one found doing so.  
Woe to one who bites.  
Alas for that awful hostility preserved so long!  
That serpent’s awful hostility  
directed against that woman  
known as the “woman who reveres the Lord”  
[Prov. 31:30].  
That wicked hostility nursed against her  
since the day of the world’s creation,  
until he shattered her,  
casting her to lay upon the ground.

Alas! How lonely sits the city great with people  
[*Aikhah Yashvah Badad, Ha-‘Ir Rabbati Am*].

If you examine the letters beginning each word

you will find an intimation  
of that horrific hostility nurtured  
until the Temple's destruction.  
They spell out the words "horrible enmity" [*Eivah*  
*Ra'ah*];  
the enmity nurtured against that woman of valor  
until the Temple's destruction,  
when she was thrust down to lie in the dust.

Thus it is written:  
"Like a widow, the princess among states  
has become a thrall" [*Ke-Almanah, Rabbati ba-*  
*Goyim, Haytah la-Mas*] [Lam. 1:1].  
If one reads the first letters  
of the words in the verse  
but in reverse order  
one finds "in your shatteredness" [*Lah be-*  
*Shivrekh*]

Alas, for she has adhered to that awful enmity,  
that is the voice of the serpent.  
The bitter voice of weeping in the heavens.  
The heavens call out: "Alas!" [*Aikhah*].  
The Other Side calls out: "Enmity!" [*Aivah*].  
As it is written:  
"I will place enmity between you and the woman"  
[Gen. 3:15],  
between the side of holiness  
and that side of impurity.  
That enmity is manifest  
in the destruction of the Temple.

All of this is inscribed  
in the first verse of Lamentations  
to make known to us  
that Awful Enmity  
has adhered to her,<sup>211</sup>  
nurtured since the day  
of the world's creation.

“Alas!  
Lonely sits the city.”

Rabbi Hyrcanus opened his discourse:  
“He expelled the man  
and caused him to dwell east of  
Eden's garden' [Gen. 3:24]:  
He expelled *et*<sup>212</sup>:  
*et* is the Community of Israel  
at the time of the Temple's destruction.  
When she was banished, a divorcee,  
when she was sent forth, in dismissal,  
the King's throne fell.  
'He expelled *et*':  
This is the throne of the king.  
Woe that it has been banished!  
Woe that it has fallen!

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<sup>211</sup> To the *shekhinah*, referred to in the text literally with the appellation “*koh*.”

<sup>212</sup> *Et* is an untranslated participle indicating the direct object.

“‘He expelled the man’:  
That man who reigns upon the throne.  
Concerning him it is written:  
‘Upon the likeness of the throne,  
the likeness of the image of a man’ [Ezek. 1:26].  
When the throne fell,  
everything fell.

“‘. . . And caused him to dwell’:  
He who banished that one  
settled and rested another indwelling [upon it]—  
the opposite of the one preceding it.  
When the Temple was destroyed,  
he ascended to the supernal Glory above  
and diminished His likeness from its  
previous form.  
He removed his throne from it  
and departed.  
Then, if such were possible,  
the *shekhinah* settled with the cherubim below,  
and was separated from the supernal Glory.  
Then that flaming sword was set in his place of  
dominion,  
to guard and hide that path  
which proceeds from the tree of life.  
Concerning this Solomon the King cried out and  
said:  
‘The earth shudders at three things  
At four which it cannot bear:  
A slave who becomes king . . .  
A slave-girl who supplants her mistress’ [Prov.  
30:21].

The slave-girl within,  
the mistress without.”

“Alas!

Lonely sits the city. . . .”

What is the meaning of the word “lonely”?

The verse states, “She sits alone”:

outside of the camp, her proper dwelling site.

“Alas!

Lonely sits the city. . . .”

R. Haninai and the Sages applied this verse to the  
first human.

“‘The Lord God took the man

and placed him in the Garden of Eden’ [Gen. 2:15].

‘The Lord God took him. . . .’:

How did he take him?”

R. Haninai says:

“He persuaded him, enticed him with words.”

As it says:

“Take Aaron along with his sons. . . .”

The Sages said:

“He took him with the wind. As it says:

‘When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to  
heaven in a whirlwind,

Elijah and Elisha had set out from Gilgal. . . .

Disciples of the

prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to

him, “Do you

know that the Lord will take your master away  
from you today?” [II Kings 2:1–3].”

“And He placed him in the Garden of Eden”:  
 This would provide him with the leisure  
 requisite to know and cognize wisdom and Torah.  
 As R. Haninai says:  
 “The Blessed Holy One taught Adam the Torah.  
 As it says:  
 ‘Whence does Wisdom come. . . ?  
 God understands the way to it. . . .  
 He saw it and gauged it;  
 He measured it and probed it.  
 He said to man:  
 “See! Fear of the Lord is wisdom,  
 To shun evil is understanding” [Job 28:20–28].”  
 The angels of service praised Adam  
 until Samael saw him from the heavens  
 and grew jealous of him.  
 He descended from the heavens  
 in the form of a shadow surmounted by a serpent.  
 The serpent was visible;  
 the shadow was its source of power and vigor.  
 That serpent drew near the woman  
 whose intelligence was weaker than the man’s.  
 From here we learn that a woman is seduced  
 only through another woman.  
 The serpent began: “Did God really [*af*] say:  
 ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden’?”  
 He began his discourse immediately with the word  
*really* [*af*].  
 From here one learns that one can recognize  
 the character of an individual  
 from the opening words of their conversation.

So the serpent began with *af*,  
revealing who he truly was.<sup>213</sup>  
Take hold of this sign whether or not you accept it.  
He enticed her with his blandishments  
until she responded with a sentence beginning with  
the letter M:

“We are permitted to eat from all of the garden’s  
trees” [*Mikol etz ha-gan akhol nokhal*; Gen.  
3:2].

The serpent immediately took that letter  
and affixed it to his left arm,  
waiting until the letters *vav* [ו] and *tav* [ט]  
exited from her mouth,  
so that death [*mavei*] might be prepared for them.  
He began to entice her with his words  
until the narrative arrives at the words  
“the woman saw that the tree was good for eating”  
[*va-teire ha-ishah*; Gen. 3:6].

The cantillation mark accompanying this phrase  
registers that the note  
be chanted with extraordinary emphasis.<sup>214</sup>

This informs us  
that the letters *vav* and *tav* [in *va-teire*]  
flew out from her lips and ascended  
to conjoin with the letter *mem*.  
But the letter *mem* ascended and descended

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<sup>213</sup> The word ‘*af*, in this case translated “really,” can also be a noun meaning “anger,” and thus the name of a destructive angel.

<sup>214</sup> The note on *ishah* is a *pazer* and is an ascending crescendo recited three times.

and did not conjoin with those letters  
until she was seduced  
and enunciated the letters *vav* and *tav*  
four times.  
They then conjoined with the letter *mem*  
in all four directions.  
Thus it is written:  
“She took of its fruit and ate. She gave some to her  
husband . . .  
and the eyes of both of them were opened” [Gen.  
3:6].

[*VaTikah mipiryo VaTokhal VaTiten gam la-ishah . . .  
VaTifkahnah einei shneihem*]

The letters *vav* and *tav* appear four times.  
This reveals that they surrounded the letter *mem*  
on all four sides, the *mem* standing at their center,  
*mavet* or death existing in all four directions.

As it says:  
“For death has climbed through our windows,  
Has entered our fortresses . . .” [Jer. 9:20].  
This is Samael who is one of the windows of  
heaven.

Concerning this Scripture states:  
“What man can live and not see death,  
can save himself from the clutches of Sheol?” [Ps.  
89:49].

Samael immediately dominated Eve  
and cast his filth upon her.

The Blessed Holy One descended to see  
and the man and his wife hid.

Come and see.  
Before they sinned,  
*Shekhinah* was a crown upon their heads.  
For their sake she rested within the world.  
When they sinned,  
if such were possible,  
her power was diminished  
and she departed, no longer ruling the world.  
The Blessed Holy One  
began to keen and say:  
“Alas!  
What will become of her?  
Dominion has departed her.”  
Similarly,  
when the Temple was destroyed,  
divine sovereignty departed,  
and the Blessed Holy One  
began to lament and say:  
“Alas!  
What will become of it!”

“Alas!”  
R. Pinhas opened his discourse [with Jer. 31:15]:  
“A cry is heard in Ramah,  
wailing, bitter weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children.  
She refuses to be comforted  
For her children who are gone.’

“When the Temple was destroyed and set ablaze,  
a voice went and aroused itself

over the graves of the primordial fathers.  
It said:  
'Primordial fathers,  
you are slumbering in your sleep  
and are unaware of the world's suffering.  
The children whom you raised with great labor,  
and brought up with great faith in God,  
die and are slaughtered.  
They go forth into exile among their enemies  
their hands tied behind their backs,  
perishing from starvation,  
their houses put to flame.  
Where is your compassion?!  
Where is your faith?!  
Come, arouse yourselves for their sakes!'

"The fathers and mothers woke immediately.  
The went before Moses,  
saying to him:  
'Moses, faithful shepherd!  
Where are those children?  
Where did you leave them?'  
Moses aroused himself immediately  
and in their company went to Joshua.  
Moses said to him:  
'The children of these fathers  
the children of Israel  
whose charge God gave me,  
whom I left in your hand—  
Where are they?'

“Joshua answered, saying:  
‘Our Master Moses.  
I left them in the holy land.  
I left them, dividing the land for them  
in accord with a lottery as you commanded me.  
I left all of them,  
each in accord with his inheritance and lot.’

“Immediately, all of them journeyed to the holy  
land.  
They found it destroyed,  
bereft of human voice.  
They entered the Sanctuary  
and found it consumed by flame.  
They lamented,  
producing a sound of bitter weeping  
so strong that it reached the heights of heaven  
and all of the celestial angels weeped with them  
from on high.

“The Blessed Holy One  
was Himself aroused  
and came to them.  
He found them  
grieving bitterly,  
with crying voices  
amidst the dust of the Sanctuary.  
He said to them:  
‘My soul’s beloved—what are you doing here?  
Why is my beloved in my house?’

Grandfather Abraham was the first to rise.  
He addressed the world's Master:  
'You know how I walked before You in the path of  
truth.  
Ten times you tested me; I withstood them all.  
Where are my children?  
For I do not hear their voices  
within the land in which you promised  
to sustain them.'

"The Blessed Holy One said to him:  
'Alas, Abraham my soul's beloved!  
"Holy flesh has passed away from you" [Jer.  
11:15]:  
your descendants annulled the holy covenant  
and engaged in idolatrous worship.  
For this reason  
my anger waxed against them.  
I was long suffering for your sake,  
but they did not return to Me.'

"When Abraham heard this, he said:  
'May all of their sins against the holiness of Your  
Name  
be erased among the nations  
until You will to return them to You.'  
All of them acted thusly  
and departed.

"Yet Rachel remained there  
and raised her voice in the most embittered of  
cries.

The Blessed Holy One said to her:  
'Rachel, for what reason are you crying?'  
She said to him:  
'Shall I not cry?  
Where are my children?  
How have they sinned against you?'  
God answered:  
'They brought My rival before Me;  
They introduced it into My house!'  
Immediately, Rachel retorted:  
'Did I not do more than that?  
I brought my rival into my own house!'

"As it is taught:  
'Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kins-  
man . . .' [Gen. 29:12].  
Jacob said: 'Marry me.'  
Rachel said: 'Yes. But I have a sister who is older  
than I.  
I fear my father for he is a trickster.'  
Immediately 'Jacob told Rachel that he was her  
father's kinsman':  
akin to him in trickery.  
He transmitted secret signs to her.  
When Leah entered that night,  
Rachel said:  
'Now my sister will be shamed.'  
She went and taught her the signs.  
For this reason she said to God:  
'Have I not done more?  
For I brought my rival into my house!

And You, of whom it is written  
that You are compassionate, gracious and long  
suffering.

You should have overlooked their sins!’

“She accepted no comfort from everything which He  
said to her,

as it is written:

‘A cry is heard in Ramah,

wailing, bitter weeping.

Rachel weeping for her children.

She refuses to be comforted

For her children who are gone.’

She had no desire to receive comfort.

Why?

Because it was not like former days

when He rested among them.

But rather, He had ascended above.

Because God was no longer among her children

she refused consolation until He promised her:

‘Restrain your voice from weeping,

Your eyes from shedding tears,

For there is a reward for your labor. . . .

Your children shall return to their country’ [Jer.

39:16].

“As Rachel acted in the worlds below,

So too the *shekhinah* engaged the worlds above.

So the Aramaic translation

renders our verse:

‘In the celestial heights

a voice is heard.<sup>215</sup>  
The *shekhinah* cries for her children.  
At that time  
her lamentations aroused  
sixty myriads of heavenly angels.  
Before her all commenced to cry.  
At that moment  
a voice was heard  
piercing far, far  
to the Aravot heaven,  
shaking one thousand worlds,  
hidden from creation's day,  
from their rest.

“To the height of heaven,  
that voice penetrated.  
What is the height of heaven?  
It is that expanse,  
whose awe-inspiring gleam  
is like crystal,  
extending over the heads  
of the *hayyot* [Ezek. 1:22].

“Then Mother  
revealed herself to Daughter,  
saying to her:  
‘Restrain your voice from weeping . . .’ [Jer. 31:16].  
Then *shekhinah* departed that place,

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<sup>215</sup> Reading *kol be-Ramah* (“a voice in Ramah”) as *kol be-ruma* (“a voice in the heights”).

entering exile with her troops,  
dispersing into multiple directions,  
so that all might experience banishment,  
the *shekhinah* remaining alone.”

“Alas!” said Rabbi Nehunia:  
“Who said this?  
That world-to-come,  
supernal, hidden within.”  
*Aikhah*: Just a breathing out of air.  
For this reason  
the word is spirit-breath;  
neither tongue, teeth, nor lips  
participate in saying it.  
Mother inquired  
concerning her daughter—  
Is this the “crowing of kir,”  
the great lord and master?

“How sits. . . ?”  
Sits rather than stands.  
At first the *shekhinah* stood,  
all of her troops standing with her.  
Now desolate, she sits.  
All alone.  
As it is written:  
“He shall sit alone” [Lev. 13:46]:  
Like one defiled.  
“The maid servant inheriting her mistress” [Prov.  
30:23]:  
The defiler assuming her place

II. The inhabitants of Babylon sent this missive to the inhabitants of the holy land.

It is indeed proper for you to cry.  
Lamentation becomes you.  
You should engage in mourning.  
For you gaze upon  
Mother's ruined palaces,  
her bed overturned:  
a sign of mourning.  
She is not found there;  
She has flown from your midst  
and you no longer know her presence.

You say that She  
is with us in exile,  
among us has  
She come down to dwell.  
And that if so,  
we ought to rejoice,  
for Ezekiel the Seer  
has envisioned her here,  
with all of her host.  
Indeed for this reason,  
we ought to cry and lament,  
like the jackals and ostriches  
of the wilderness.  
For She is driven from her palace  
and we are in exile;  
She has come to us grieving,  
and sees us daily

in our great distress,  
the harsh decrees enacted against us.  
From our pain  
She cannot release us,  
from all these afflictions which we suffer.

The inhabitants of the holy land sent the following  
missive:

It is fitting,  
for our mother is uprooted  
and banished from her palace,  
descending to you  
in bitterness and a saddened voice,  
like a woman bereft of her mind,  
like a man who can not redeem.  
Lamentation befits you.

But as for us,  
it is ours to cry,  
to lament in wails  
and embittered cries,  
for every day  
we see the Temple destroyed,  
the foxes of the wilderness  
wandering into it to and fro,  
ostriches shrieking in its midst.  
We see,  
We weep.  
And while we are  
sitting perplexed,

lying, our faces  
buried in the dust,  
we hear the pleasant sound  
of her footsteps  
during the night's three watches  
as she descends  
and views her palace  
burnt to cinders.  
Moving from chamber to chamber,  
from hall to hall,  
she sighs, bemoans and cries  
for us and for our souls.  
And we rise to this  
her trilling voice  
of weeping and ululation.  
Our very life force  
flies out to her.  
For a short while  
our vital spirit abandons us.  
We neither hear  
nor know a thing  
for we remain perplexed,  
oblivious as the dead,  
without vitality,  
bereft of consciousness.  
We cry out:  
"Alas!"

We have taught:  
"Every night,  
from the heights of heaven

to the worlds below,  
from the worlds below  
to heavens above,  
Zion's voice,  
embittered pain,  
makes itself heard."

As it is written:  
"From on high  
the Lord roars;  
from His holy dwelling  
He makes Himself heard,  
He roars aloud  
over His earthly abode" [Jer. 25:30].

At the onset of night,  
she sets herself to weeping,  
roaring from the heavenly heights above.  
She descends below,  
to the place of the outer altar,  
views her place destroyed,  
utterly defiled,  
every place abandoned.  
Lowing, wailing, crying out in a bitter voice,  
she says:  
"O altar, My altar!  
My sustenance.  
Sating Me with oblations of water and wine,  
sacrifices pure and holy.  
From you  
all of the holy people,

the great multitudes of hosts,  
drew their delight and rejoiced,  
consuming their delicacies,  
sharing their portions  
with the heights of heavens.

The enemies placed upon you  
the corpses of pious saints,  
my children slaughtered upon you.  
Their blood desolates me!”

All the mighty men,  
the princes and officers celestial,  
fell from their places  
at the sound of their cries.  
The holy *Arelim*,  
encrowned with the letter of the holy name,  
in which they rejoiced,  
from which they drew sustenance,  
stood outside,  
wailing and crying.  
With the sound of their lament,  
this letter flew away from them,  
ascending to the heavenly heights.  
They were like a woman  
who cries and laments.  
As it is written:  
“Hark! The *Arelm* cry outside” [Isa. 33:7].  
*Arelm* is written defectively,  
without the *yod*.

“They cry outside”:  
“My altar! My altar!  
Now that you have sated me  
with the bodies of my holy children,  
my saints, who offered their lives upon you,  
you are hidden away.  
Where might I find you?  
Where is the fire that was upon you?”

From each of the world’s four quarters,  
Six thousand holy angels  
who consumed the sacrifices daily,  
descend with her,  
lamenting and mourning  
the altar of the burnt offerings.  
There had been more  
but their numbers diminished.  
Even those forces which stood outside,  
within the dimension of that other spirit,  
who were nurtured from those limbs  
and fat particles  
burnt through the onset of night,  
cried, lowed and lamented  
that altar.  
“Woe to the donkey  
which has lost its crib,  
the place from which  
it drew its nourishment!”

Who has seen anything  
like the mourning of those holy servitors

of the celestial Lady,  
spanning the worlds terrestrial to those celestial,  
from the worlds above to those below!

At midnight He enters  
into the point called "Zion,"  
the place of the Holy of Holies.  
He sees it destroyed and defiled,  
Her dwelling-place and her bed.  
She breaks out in wailing,  
Flying up from below,  
down from above.  
She looks at the place of the cherubim  
and calls out with a bitter cry:  
"My bed! My bed!  
The place of my dwelling!"  
Concerning this place  
it is written:  
"Upon My bed at night" [Cant. 3:1].  
"My bed": the bedstead of the celestial lady.

She utters a cry and says:  
"My bedstead!  
The place of My sanctuary!  
The locus of precious rubies!  
The inner sanctum's screen  
and the ark's cover!  
Sixty thousand myriads of precious gems  
were affixed within you,  
meticulously arrayed  
rows upon rows,

all reflecting each other.  
You were plated with rows of pomegranates  
upon all four sides.  
For your sake  
the Master of the World  
sustained the universe.

My husband would come to me,  
lie between my arms.  
At that time,  
he fulfilled my every wish,  
each and every desire.  
He would come to me,  
making me his dwelling-place,  
taking his pleasure between my breasts.

Oh my bed, my bed!  
Don't you remember  
when I would come to you in joy,  
in the heart's beauty,  
how myriads of youths  
would precede me,  
to receive me,  
their wings rustling in joy.  
Your very dust  
would rise from its place,  
they would view my exaltation.

From the ark of the Torah  
placed there,  
sustenance would go out to the entire world,  
light and blessing for all.

I look for my husband  
but he is not here.  
I search in every direction.

At that time,  
when my husband would come to me,  
surrounded by countless righteous sons,  
these angelic maidens prepared to greet him.  
From afar,  
I would hear the sound of the clustered bells  
ringing between his legs,  
so that his approach  
might be audible  
before he came to me.  
My maidens would praise and glorify  
the Blessed Holy One.  
Then they would depart,  
we would be alone,  
embracing in kisses of love.

My husband, O my husband!  
Where have you gone?  
Now is the time that I would gaze upon you.  
In every direction  
I seek you  
but you are not there.  
Where can I gaze upon you  
and not put my claim upon you.  
This is your place, your time,  
to come to me.  
Here I await you,  
but you have forgotten me.

Don't you remember  
the days of our love,  
when I would lie with you so firmly  
that I was impressed with your image,  
your likeness impressed upon mine,  
and mine upon you,  
like a seal  
embossing its impression  
upon a document.  
So I left my image upon you  
so that you might delight in it,  
when I was among my host."

Crying,  
she moaned and called:  
"My husband, my husband,  
my eyes' light grows darkened.  
Don't you remember when  
you stretched your right hand  
under mine  
and I took my joy  
in that abundance of peace,  
your right hand  
embracing me like a brother's,  
and with kisses  
You swearing to me  
that your love  
would never cease?  
You swore to me:  
'If I forget Jerusalem  
may my right hand wither!' [Ps. 137:5].

Yet,  
by you  
I have been  
forgotten!

“Don’t you remember  
how I stood,  
six hundred thousand perfect individuals  
before you at Mt. Sinai  
accepting your kingship?  
With them I crowned you,  
more than with all the other nations,  
we followed you  
in accord with your will.

“That maidservant<sup>216</sup> killed them  
in their thousands and myriads;  
I protested not.  
All were lost in the desert,  
where you left them.  
Their small children  
I brought to stand before you in this land.  
I separated them to stand before you  
in accord with your will.

“My husband! My husband!  
Remember how many holy children  
I brought before you in every generation.

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<sup>216</sup> Referring to the mixed multitude, held responsible for the sins of Israel in the wilderness. See Prov. 30:23.

“In the days of David and Solomon his son?  
Do you not remember how much good they did  
before you?  
Is it fitting for you  
to remember sins and not merits?  
How has it all been turned upon us?  
I seek you  
but you are not;  
I inquire after my children  
but they are not.  
I inquire after the sanctity of this place;  
it is defiled.

“On account of this place  
the world in its entirety  
attained peace.  
At that time  
the dogs did not howl,  
all was harmonious.”

*Shekhinah*  
moans and laments,  
the inhabitants of the worlds celestial  
and the dogs below  
join her,  
at the onset of the third watch.

Departing,  
she comes to the place of the altar of incense,  
moaning, crying  
she descends above,

and finds one of the two cherubim  
who had served her before,  
(for from the time of the destruction  
she had retained but one).  
From her  
that young child who remains  
nurses lamentations and tears.

Then the Blessed Holy One  
encounters her,  
comes down and  
converses with her.  
As it is written:  
“Refrain from crying,  
your eyes from tears,  
for there is hope for your future” [Jer. 31:15].

Of this it is taught:  
[During the third watch of night]  
“an infant nurses at its mother’s breast,  
a wife converses with her husband.”<sup>217</sup>

Until this point, we have the opening homiletical exposition; from this point, the beginning of the exposition of the book of Lamentations.

“Alas!  
How sits alone!”

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<sup>217</sup> b. *Berakhot* 3a.

Our sages commenced their discourse with this  
verse:

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,  
Before the evil days befall you,  
And the years draw nigh when you shall say:  
‘I have no pleasure in them’” [Eccles. 12:1].

We have explicated this verse  
as referring to Israel  
when they were dwelling in the Holy Land.

“Remember your Creator”:  
Remember all of those acts of beneficence,  
all of those signs and miracles  
which the Blessed Holy One  
performed for you in ancient days,  
when you were a faithful child.  
As it says:  
“Israel was a child and I loved him” [Hos. 11:1].  
“In the days of your youth”:  
The time when He favored you  
from all of the world’s peoples.  
“Before the evil days befall you.”  
The days of old age  
when the nations shall rule you  
and disperse you among the peoples.  
“The Days of your youth”:  
The days of the year designated specifically for  
you,  
when divine providence rests upon you.  
These are the four months  
of Adar, Nisan, Iyyar and Sivan.

These are the days when  
the Blessed Holy One chose Israel,  
performing miracles in their midst,  
the Congregation of Israel crowning herself  
with her husband,  
drawing near to him.

“Before the evil days befall you”:  
The days of old age,  
evil days in truth.  
These are Tammuz, Av, Tevet and Shevat,  
although [in the latter]  
the evil is not so clearly revealed.  
A sign:  
“A rod [shevet] is for the back of him  
who lacks discernment” [Prov. 10:13].

“And the years arrive concerning which you say:  
‘I have no pleasure in them’” [Eccles. 12:1]:  
The years of dispersion  
in which Israel sets forth into exile.  
“I have no pleasure in them.”  
We have taught:  
“There are times during the period of exile  
during which a person has nothing to sell  
in the market place.  
Then the coin vanishes from the pocket.”<sup>218</sup>

“Before the sun, and the light, and the moon,

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<sup>218</sup> See b. *Sanhedrin* 97a.

and the stars are darkened,  
and the clouds return after the rain” [Eccles. 12:2].

“Before the sun . . . is darkened”:

This is *shekhinah*’s countenance  
radiating both above and below.

Who are these from below?

These are the masters of the Mishnah,  
residing in the land of Israel,  
iron hammers  
piercing rocks,  
uprooting mighty mountains.

“. . . And the light . . . is darkened”:

This is the Talmud of Jerusalem  
radiating light like the Torah.

After this was annulled,  
it was as if they were left in darkness.

It is written:

“You have placed me in dark places” [Lam. 3:6].

This is the Babylonian Talmud<sup>219</sup>  
through which the world’s inhabitants  
traverse dark places.

“. . . and the moon . . .”:

These are the *baraitot*<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> See b. *Sanhedrin* 24a.

<sup>220</sup> *Baraitot* are quotations of early rabbinic teaching within the Talmud.

which shone with the refulgence  
of hidden wisdom.

“. . . and the stars . . .”:  
These are the enlightened,  
residing in the holy land—  
all the Tannaim and Amoraim  
for whose sake the world was sustained.  
For when they lived together as one,  
an individual would say to his companions:  
“From the very word which has  
blossomed from your lips,  
I can see that today or tomorrow  
the following will occur.”

Another interpretation:  
“Before the sun darkens . . .”:  
The light of the *shekhinah*'s countenance  
which shone every day.  
From that light the world was sustained,  
and Israel dwelt securely within the land.  
That light was created by the Blessed Holy One,  
during the primal act of creation.  
It shone from one end of the earth to the other.  
The Blessed Holy One  
sequestered that light,  
manifesting but  
one filament of His right hand  
from it  
touching the moon.

It is written concerning that time:

“He turned back His right hand” [Lam. 2:3];  
“and the moon, and the stars are darkened” [Eccles.  
12:2].

It is written concerning the moon:

“Righteousness dwells within it” [Isa. 1:21].

The stars are the angels of service  
who came to her,  
were known to consort with her.

They were removed from their stations.

These had been called “the angels of peace.”

“And the clouds return after the rain” [Eccles.  
12:2].

As it is written:

“The angels of peace cry bitterly” [Isa. 33:7];  
“In the day when the keepers of the house shall  
tremble,  
and the strong men shall bow down,  
and the grinders cease because they are few,  
and those that gaze through the windows are  
darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the street,  
when the sound of the grinding is low,  
and one shall start up at the voice of a bird,  
and all of the daughters of music shall be brought  
low” [Eccles. 12:3–4].

“In the days when the keepers of the house shall  
tremble” [Eccles. 12:3]:

These are the three courts  
which taught Torah  
in the Chamber of Hewn Stone.

“And the strong men shall bow down”:  
These are the members of the greater and lesser  
Sanhedrin.

“And those who grind cease . . .”:  
These are the priests and the Levites  
and all of the members of the Temple watches  
present in Jerusalem.

“Those who gaze out through the windows are  
darkened”:

These are priests and seers who saw  
through prophecy or the holy spirit.

“The door shall be shut in the market” [Eccles.  
12:4]:

For people shall call out  
but none sit before them,  
for all of the gates have been closed  
since the Temple was destroyed  
and the service of our House of God abolished.

“When the sound of the grinders is low”:

These are the grinders of incense  
whose sound could be heard each day  
as they did their grinding.

Another Interpretation:

“the sound of the grinding”:  
this is the *shekhinah's* voice,  
daily proclaiming:  
“Return backsliding children.”  
But none pay her heed.

“And all the daughters of music shall be brought low”:

These are [the Levites]  
who ascended daily  
to their stage  
and performed melodious song.

“All” the daughters means to include  
the celestial angels above,  
divided into watches on high,  
corresponding to the watches below.  
Those below have been brought low.  
So too have the angels above, as it were,  
been brought low.

“When they shall be afraid also of that which is high,

and terrors shall be in the way,  
and the almond tree shall blossom,  
and the grasshopper shall drag itself along,  
and the caperberry shall fail,  
because man goes to his eternal home,  
and the mourners go about the streets” [Eccles.  
12:5].

“When they shall be afraid also of that which is high”:

Even though they were dwarfs  
when considered from above,  
they were afraid.

“Shall be brought low”:

Those daughters of song were brought low,

for when eighty thousand Levites,  
their hands bound behind their backs,  
arrived at Babylon's rivers,  
they hung their harps upon the trees.  
The Babylonians requested that they play.  
They responded:  
"How can we sing the Lord's song  
on foreign soil" [Ps. 137:4].  
They bit off their thumbs  
with their teeth  
so that they could not play  
and then the Babylonians massacred them.

"And terrors shall be in the way":  
They marched with millstones  
around their necks,  
and due to the overwhelming pressure,  
their fingers fell off their hands in the road.  
Jeremiah would gather them in his cape,  
kiss them,  
bewail them,  
say to them:  
"My children,  
Did I not instruct you:  
'Give glory to the Lord your God  
before it grows dark,  
before you feet stumble . . .' [Jer. 13:16]."  
And concerning this it is written:  
"For the mountains I will  
take up a weeping and a wailing,  
and for the pastures of the wilderness  
a lamentation" [Jer. 9:9].

“The Almond tree shall blossom”:  
Twenty-one days pass  
from the day upon which  
the blossoms of the almond tree sprout  
to the day upon which it brings forth fruit.  
So too,  
the seventeenth of Tammuz<sup>221</sup>  
until the ninth of Av<sup>222</sup>  
is a period of twenty-one days.  
As it is written:  
“I see the rod of the almond tree” [Jer. 1:11].

“The grasshopper shall drag itself along”:  
For a burden has been placed  
upon the shoulders of David’s seed.

“And the caperberry shall fail”:  
For worship in God’s house is abolished.

“A person proceeds to his home eternal”:  
This is the Glory which has ascended above,  
mortals groaning,  
no one paying them heed.

“Before the silver cord is snapped asunder  
and the golden bowl is shattered,

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<sup>221</sup> A fast day commemorating the Romans’ breaching the walls of Jerusalem.

<sup>222</sup> The great summer fast day in memory of the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

and the pitcher is shattered at its foundation”  
[Eccles. 12:6].

“Before the silver cord is snapped asunder”:  
the inner altar,  
the place upon which  
the priest offered incense.

“And the golden bowl is shattered”:  
That is the Holy of Holies,  
where the golden cherubim  
were located.

“And the pitcher is shattered at its foundation”:  
This is the sovereignty  
of the House of David,  
which has been shattered.

“And the dust returns to the earth as it was,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it” [Eccles.  
12:7].

“And the dust returns to the earth as it was”:  
The Temple is destroyed,  
rendered into dust.

“And the spirit returns to God who gave it”:  
This is the *shekhinah*  
and the spirit of prophecy’s departure  
from the world.

R. Yudai commenced his discourse:

“‘In the day when the keepers  
of the house shall tremble’ [Eccles. 12:3]:

These are the Tannaim and Amoraim,  
who watched over the inhabitants  
of the land of Israel  
and were pulled from their places.  
'And the strong men shall bow down' [Eccles.  
12:3]:  
Shall be treated perversely.  
As it says:  
'And there are men of valor in their midst' [Gen.  
47:6].  
This refers to the sin of  
the sons of Jacob,  
strong, worthy men,  
who suffered a perversion of justice,  
as it is written:  
'Does God pervert justice?' [Job. 8:3].  
These men of valor  
received a perversion of justice.  
For such is the serpent's path.  
Upon killing a person,  
it returns and bites him again, without mercy.  
This is what is meant  
by a perversion of justice."

The inhabitants of the land of Israel sent this message to  
the Babylonians:

It befits you to lament  
like one who cries from afar.  
For mourning, eulogizing, crying  
in lamentation and bitterness of spirit

are not germane to you.  
You have washed your feet,  
have no desire to dirty them  
as you did earlier,  
as it is written:  
“I have washed my feet,  
how shall I dirty them?” [Cant. 5:3].  
But we who dwell  
within the borders of the serpent,  
which daily kills and bites,  
have seen with our very eyes  
the perversion of justice  
wrought among us,  
directed toward those men of valor.  
During their earlier, terrestrial lives  
it made no demand for justice,  
it kept its silence,  
for it regarded them with a great terror  
and could not stand against them.  
When they entered the World that is Coming  
in a state of contrition,  
that serpent stood before  
the Blessed Holy One  
and demanded justice.  
It referred specifically to the words of the verse:  
“when an individual kidnaps a man and sells him,  
if the victim is found within the kidnapper’s  
presence,  
the kidnapper shall be executed” [Exod. 21:16].  
The Blessed Holy One said to that serpent:  
“Joseph was not yet a man.  
Nor was he found in their hands.”

The serpent returned and said:  
“If a person kidnaps a soul  
from among his brethren,  
the children of Israel,  
and abuses him by selling him,  
that thief shall surely die” [Deut. 24:7].

For eight hundred years that serpent  
stood and demanded justice.  
And we have taught:  
“A person convicted on two counts  
suffers the more severe penalty.”<sup>223</sup>  
Woe is he who receives punishment for his sins!  
For death atones for his offenses  
but they returned to undergo additional punish-  
ment!  
Alas!  
These men of valor were mistreated  
as Samael the serpent stood up  
to demand judgement.

For this reason  
it is fitting for us  
to cry and lament,  
for the holy city  
remains devoid of all  
of the good things  
which were found within it.

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<sup>223</sup> b. *Sanhedrin* 81a.

At that moment Samael descended  
and confounded the world,  
introducing this evil spirit  
into the maws of that wicked man,  
the sovereign of Rome,  
who demanded justice  
from the mighty ones of the world<sup>224</sup>  
[for the kidnapping of Joseph].

Woe!  
Woe to the world!  
Such a miscarriage of justice  
has not occurred  
since the world's creation.

Alas!  
Your children,  
the world's pillars,  
its founding columns,  
sustaining its very existence,  
who served as its crowns—  
how they have been daily  
abused by that serpent!  
How those holy spirits  
have been abused  
when they were en clothed  
in alien garments,  
so that they might be judged  
in such a shameful manner.

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<sup>224</sup> The ten martyrs of the Hadrianic persecution.

Alas,  
such a miscarriage of justice!

Who saw in the Garden of Eden  
on the day justice passed into the world  
these ten brightest pearls,  
the light of all the Garden  
amid all those trees!  
Those lights were flowing outward  
and all the trees of Eden cried forth:  
“Men of valor are being mistreated!” [Eccles. 12:3].  
Those who guard the gates of Eden  
were shaken;  
The cherubim went up and down  
but found no place to bring forth these lights  
once they had emerged from their garments.

Those above and below  
cried out before them.  
Those who guard the upper walls trembled,  
All the upper forces crying and wailing.

Who saw our Mother break out in wailing?  
She went to those cherubim  
who guard the gates of Eden  
and found them trembling.  
She and a single cherub ascended.  
Then the blade of the ever-turning sword, ever so  
sharp,  
burst through the gates.  
Out poured the ten lights.

Those above and below cried out:  
“Woe to the world! Woe to that generation!”  
We indeed should mourn like jackels.

When our Mother came down  
and did not find them in the Garden,  
seeing all the light and perfumes breaking out in  
tears,  
So too did She.  
Then the cherubim,  
Guardians of the Garden,  
also wept.  
Wailing, they began to cry.

How much more should we cry out  
for all of it,  
including this injustice!

Again he began:  
“They sent a message to Joseph, saying:  
‘Your father commanded before he died, telling us:  
“Say unto Joseph: ‘Forgive, I pray you,  
the transgression of your brothers and their sin,  
for they did you harm. . . .’”’  
And Joseph wept when they spoke to him” [Gen.  
50:16–17].

It was against him that they sinned.  
But he forgave them, atoning for their sins!  
Since he forgave them,  
Who dares accuse them of their sins?

Indeed,  
“Men of valor have been treated perversely!”  
[Eccles. 12:3].

A great miscarriage of justice  
was done to those men of valor.  
Woe is us! Who can comfort us?

Why did that miscarriage of justice come about?  
Because our Mother had been banished and driven  
forth,  
Gone on Her way.  
Because of this justice was perverted.  
The accuser stood there alone!  
There was no one to protest,  
to lay out our case.  
For this reason  
all of our Mother’s adornments  
were placed in his hands.

Had our Mother been there,  
She’d have taken them  
beyond the line of justice!  
For this She weeps,  
wailing for Her children who are exiled,  
killed, consumed  
for nought.  
She was not present at their judgment,  
so the serpent did as he wished with them.  
Of this Scripture says:  
“At your sin, your mother was sent away!” [Isa.  
50:1].

Your Mother was sent away  
so that she not be present at your trial.

“How does she sit solitary!” [Lam. 1:1].  
In that hour  
when She bears the complaint of her children,  
since it was because of Her  
that their judgment was carried out.

Now when those ten pearls  
came forth from the Garden of Eden  
to be dressed in other garments,<sup>225</sup>  
All of those garments were given over  
Into the hands of the serpent,  
except for one.

That is Reuben, of whom it says:  
“Reuben returned to the pit” [Gen. 37:29].  
Because he counseled to put Joseph in the pit,  
he was caught in the pit and saved.  
This refers to Rabbi Eliezer the Great.  
When the heretics caught him<sup>226</sup>  
he was placed in a pit.  
Thus the soul of Reuben was saved.

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<sup>225</sup> The reincarnation of the ten sons of Jacob as the ten martyrs.

<sup>226</sup> See b. *Avodah Zarah* 16b.

### III

## R. Bahya ben Asher of Saragossa Commentary on Genesis 1:1–2

### Introduction

Rabbi Bahya ben Asher, a judge and preacher in Saragossa in the late thirteenth century, is a key transmitter of Kabbalistic exegesis. His *Commentary on the Torah*, composed in 1291 and first printed in Naples in 1492, is one of the most popular and accessible Kabbalistic commentaries, as attested by its frequent publication over the centuries and the quotations from it throughout later Jewish literature.

R. Bahya is the best-known Jewish follower of the four-fold interpretation of Scripture. Rather than using the widespread acronym of PaRDeS (*Peshat*, simple or literal interpretation; *Remez*, allegorical or philosophical interpretation; *Derash*, homiletical interpretation; *Sod*, mystical interpretation), he prefers rather more explicit terminology. He refers to the four paths as *peshat*, *midrash*, *sekhel* (lit. “intellectual,” mostly philosophical), and *Kabbalah*, meaning “received” or esoteric interpretations. This nomenclature is partly adapted from R. Moses ben Nahman (or Nahmanides, 1194–1270), the leading rabbinic figure in northern Spain in the thirteenth

century. An early publicizer of Kabbalistic secrets, Nahmanides was the first to include them within an otherwise exoteric and immensely popular Commentary to the Torah. R. Bahya, a student of Nahmanides' follower R. Solomon ben Adret (1235–c.1310), seems to derive much of his Kabbalistic tradition from the school of Nahmanides and from his Geronese contemporaries. His work is almost precisely contemporaneous with the writing of the Zohar, the most important literary creation of Castilian Kabbalah. The relationship between R. Bahya and the Zohar, along with other aspects of R. Bahya's work, has been studied in great detail by the late Ephraim Gottlieb.<sup>227</sup>

In addition to his *Commentary on the Torah*, R. Bahya is author of a commentary on the Tractate Avot, an ethical work known as *Kad ha-Kemah* ("The Jar of Flour," referring to I Kings 17:16), and a treatise on the meaning of eating and proper behavior at meals called *Shulhan shel Arba'* ("The Table of Four;" cf. Ezek. 40:41). Annotated additions of all these works have been edited by C. Chavel, and are currently published by the Rabbi Kook Institute Press in Jerusalem.

The sample offered here, R. Bahya's comments on the opening verses of Genesis (from his *Commentary on the Torah*), gives a particularly rich illustration of the fourfold method as it was practiced by Jewish scholars. We see him drawing from several of the bodies of knowledge available to thinking men of his day:

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<sup>227</sup> *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher Ibn Halawa*. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1970.

grammatical insights, highly developed among Jewish exegetes from the tenth century onward; rabbinic tradition; Aristotelian philosophy; mathematics; astrology; and the “new,” or at least newly revealed method of reading known as Kabbalah. All of these exist side by side with one another, serving as complementary bodies of knowledge. As we see in parts of this passage, however, it is Kabbalah that has now become “queen” of the sciences, and the others are occasionally used in subservience to this reading that so fascinates our author.

[Text]

[1:1–2] **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was chaotic and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the waters.**

**In the beginning** [*bereshit*]: According to the plain meaning, *bereshit* is to be read as meaning “at first.” However, it does not state “at first” because the word “in the beginning” connotes many great, powerful and highly significant meanings which are not included in the phrase “at first.”

According to the opinion of R. Solomon b. Isaac [Rashi], “in the beginning” is the first member of a construct clause (literally meaning “in the beginning of”), as is the case in all of its appearances in Scripture.<sup>228</sup> Consequently, only light was created on the first day. The verse is to be interpreted: “In the beginning of the creation of

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<sup>228</sup> Construct clauses occur when two or more words, usually nouns, are conjoined to form a compound idea. The opening phrase of the Hebrew text of Gen. 1:1 is a prepositional phrase *bereshit*, “in the beginning of,” followed immediately by the verb *bara*, “created.” The prepositional phrase lacks nominal closure. Rashi resolves the grammatical difficulty by reading *bara* as a gerund on the order of Hosea 1:2. Thus, the opening words of Genesis are to be read as “in the beginning of God’s creating heaven and earth.” The Jewish Publication Society translation (henceforth: JPS) essentially adopts Rashi’s interpretation and translates Gen. 1:1 as: “When God began to create the heavens and the earth. . . .”

heaven and earth, the earth being chaotic and void, God said: 'Let there be light!' And there was light." Everything else followed the light. Rashi says that this is similar to Hosea [1:2]: "The beginning of the Lord's speaking to Hosea. The Lord said to Hosea. . . ." His opinion is that if the verse's intent was that heaven and earth were created on the first day, it should have stipulated "At first God created the heavens and the earth, etc."

However, the true meaning is that "in the beginning" is a distinct word. It is not the subject of a construct clause and it is to be read as if the verse was stating "at first." The cantillation supports this. The meaning of the pericope is that heaven and earth and all of their generations were created on the first day from complete nothingness and absolute non-existence, as is denoted by verb "created" [*bara*], which refers to the creation of being from nought. This follows the opinion of R. Nehemiah that the entire world was created on the first day. Thus we find in the Midrash:

Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah:

Rabbi Yehudah says: "The entire world was created in six days. For it is written in the account of each and every day: 'And it was so.'"

R. Nehemiah says: "The entire world was created on the first day. As it is written: 'God said: "Let the earth bring forth every living creature . . ."' [Gen. 1:24], a matter entrusted in her hands and prepared from the beginning."

A parable exemplifying the matter. It is like a man who sows six measures at once, this coming forth on

the first day, this on the second, this on the third, and thus all of them.<sup>229</sup>

R. Nehemiah's opinion on this parable is readily apparent. The matter from which everything was derived was created on the first day. Afterwards, during the six days, the creatures were created from the particularizations of the matter, each and every one on his day. This is what is written: "For He spoke and it was; He commanded and it endured" [Ps. 33:9]. David explained that everything came to be in one statement and act of existence. Afterwards, God commanded each thing on its specific day, established them and brought them forth into actuality.

**God [*Elohim*]:** According to the plain meaning, a term for divinity whose meaning is the possession of all powers. For this reason, the verse does not use such singular terms for God as *El* or *Eloah* but rather the plural *Elohim*, as in Joshua [24:19]: "He is a holy God [*Elohim kedoshim*], for He contains all forms of holiness. One finds similar linguistic usage when dealing with sovereignty in the lower worlds, as in "I will place the Egyptians at the mercy of a harsh master[s]" [Isa. 19:4], where "masters" is in plural form, on account of the greatness of the lord's qualities and the multiple forms of governance which He possesses. If such is the case with mortals, it is even more so the case with God, be He blessed, Whose forms of governance have no number and from Whom alone all rulers derive their rulership, while He is one and His powers are many. One finds this linguistic usage with

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<sup>229</sup> Tanhuma Buber, *bereshit* 1.

many words, such as, “a night of watching[s]” [Exod. 12:42] and, “a day of atonement[s]” [Lev. 23:28].

One can further explain that God is designated *Elohim* during the creation of the world, for He created it in wisdom and understanding as it is written: “The Lord founded the earth with wisdom, He established the heavens by understanding” [Prov. 3:19].

In accord with midrashic interpretation, this name can designate a judge. Thus it is written: “You shall not curse God” [Exod. 22: 27]. Onkylos<sup>230</sup> translates this as judge.<sup>231</sup> The conjunction finds full enunciation in: “For God is a judge, humbling this one and raising that one” [Ps. 75:8]. God is designated here by this name, because He created the world through the attribute of judgment.

In accord with the mystical path, this name *ELoHiM* is comprised of two words: “These are God” [*EL HeM*]. Behold, “these are” is the interpretation of the *yod* [in *Elohim*].<sup>232</sup> [Similarly] “Remember your Creator” [Eccles. 12:1], [where “Creator” (*bor ‘ekha*) is written out in full orthographic form with a *yod*].<sup>233</sup> And the enlightened will understand.

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<sup>230</sup> The classic Aramaic Targum or translation of the Pentateuch.

<sup>231</sup> Onkylos is following the second half of the verse: “nor put a curse upon a chieftain of your people,” treating the text as a parallelism.

<sup>232</sup> The letter *yod* [י] is numerically ten; the reference is to the multiplicity of the ten *sefirot*.

<sup>233</sup> The *yod* indicates plural in this possessive form, referring both to the same plurality as in *Elohim*, but also to its meaning as “ten” *sefirot*.

**The heavens and the earth** [*et ha-shamayim ve-et ha-aretz*]: In all situations, the direct object marker *et* serves an inclusive function. According to the plain meaning, these two direct object markers preceding “the heavens and the earth” include the two modalities of matter which God created. From one of these He created the heavens and from the other the earth.

And this is the meaning of “the earth was chaotic and void.” Scripture elucidates that after this act of creation, the earth was chaotic and empty. The meaning of “chaotic and void” is matter and form. That is to say, God enclosed form into that matter, as it is written “‘All of this was made by My hand, and thus it all came into being,’ declares the Lord” [Isa. 66:2]. The verse states “all of this”—that is to say all of these creatures—were “made by My hand,” in their current form. The meaning of this is that matter was created first. Afterwards, there was no further *creatio ex nihilo* but rather formation and making, for God brought everything into being from the matter and enclothed it within forms. From out of this tiny and subtle point, having no substantiality, were created all of the creatures within heaven and earth.

In accord with midrashic interpretation, “the heavens and the earth,” the presence of the direct object marker before “the heavens” includes the sun, moon, stars, and constellations, while the direct object indicator preceding “the earth” includes the trees, grasses, and the Garden of Eden. These comprise the totality of embodied creatures.

**The earth was chaotic and void** [*tohu va-vohu*]: Chaos [*tohu*] is primordial matter, lacking substantiality and nominal designation. Chaos is designated *tohu* as in

rabbinic usage: “one who reconsiders [*be-tohe*] his prior deeds.”<sup>234</sup> For if one comes to make any designations concerning chaos he is confounded and reconsiders, calling it by another name, for it has not en clothed itself in any form through which it might be conceived of by a name. In the Torah’s terminology, this matter is called *tohu*; among the philosophers [it is called] *hyle*.

*Bohu* is the form en clothed in matter. It is a compound word: *bo hu*, “it is within it”—that is to say, an entity possessing form.<sup>235</sup>

It is for this reason that the verse states: “He shall measure it with a line of chaos [*kav tohu*] and with the blocks of emptiness [*avnei vohu*]” [Isa. 34:11]. The architect’s line is analogized to chaos, the primordial matter lacking substantiality. For it is through the plumber’s line that the architect marks out the design of the building which he hopes to construct. The term for line [*kav*] is derived from: “I put my hope [*kavoh kiviti*] in the Lord” [Ps. 40:2]. The building blocks are analogized to *bohu*, for the empty void is form, just as blocks constitute the form of the building.

Let us conjoin the common elements of these verses. The Omnipotent first concreated from naught the primordial matter of the heavens and the primordial matter of the earth. After this creation the earth was in a state of chaos. That is to say that it was unsubstantial matter

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<sup>234</sup> b. *Kiddushin* 40b.

<sup>235</sup> Rather than representing contentless chaos and the forces of entropy, *bohu* or the void represents the potentially emergent aspects of primordial reality.

[*tohu*] and an empty void, encloded with form. It [Gen. 1:2] designates the four elements which existed within this form: fire, air, water, and earth. The word “earth” includes all four elements as it delimits the totality of the lower world. Although earth is the lowest in the ontological hierarchy of elements, it is mentioned first as it is the subject of the verse. Thus the verse commences with the earth, which is a point. So the philosophers call her, for she is situated below the spheres and emplaced within them like a point within a circle. They also designate her as “point” for she is permanently enfixed, possessing movement in her parts but not in her totality, as it is written: “the earth stands forever” [Eccles. 1:4]. It is thus the opposite of the ultimate, all-encompassing sphere, which is the summit of refinement and purity. In contrast, this lowly world is the height of substantiality and ugliness.

Having begun with the earth, the verse returns and enumerates the elements in the hierarchical order proper to them: fire, air, and water. The darkness on the face of the deep is elemental fire, which is darkened. It precedes the wind, for the sphere of fire encompasses the sphere of the air, while the wind precedes the water, for the sphere of the air encompasses that of water and water that of the earth.

We have also found this order in the books of Ecclesiastes and Job. Just as here [Gen. 1] it commences with the point which is the earth, as it states: “The earth was chaotic and void” [Gen. 1:2], so too does it state “the earth stands forever” [Eccles. 1:4], and then mentions “the sun rises and the sun sets” [Eccles. 1:5], this being

the element of fire. Then it states “ever turning blows the wind” [Eccles. 1:6] and “all the streams flow to the sea” [Eccles. 1:7].

So too in Job, the enumeration begins with the terrestrial point—“[God] sees to the ends of the earth, observes all that is beneath the heavens” [Job 28:24]—the heavens being the element of fire. “When he fixed the weight of the winds, set the measure of the waters” [Job 28:25] is precisely the order here in Genesis as well as in Ecclesiastes. All three of them are works of philosophical speculation, founded upon natural science. By stating “the earth was chaotic and void,” the verse informs us that it en clothed itself in form and that darkness, the sphere of fire, encompassed the intermingled water and earth, designated together as “the deep.” Similarly, earth is intermingled with the waters of the sea, which are thus called the deep, as is written: “the deep engulfed me” [Jonah 2:6]. And the wind was blowing and entered the darkness, hovering over the waters. That the verse states “a divine wind” [*ruah Elohim*], correlating it to the name *Elohim*, when it would have been more fitting to state “the wind hovered” is to due to its great refinement. Even though fire is more elevated than air, Scripture did not desire to correlate it with the divine, due to its appearance under the designation of darkness.<sup>236</sup>

**In the beginning God created heaven and earth,** according to the way of Midrash: The world was created

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<sup>236</sup> Though in the Platonic system, whence all discussion of the four elements derives, fire is light and represents the most elevated of the four, Bahya sees a negative aspect attributed to fire in the biblical sources. Therefore, *Elohim* is associated rather with “wind” or air.

by the merit of three offerings: the dough, the tithe, and the first fruits.

“Beginning” refers only to hallah, the dough-offering: “The first [*reshit*] of your dough-kneading troughs you shall offer” [Num. 15:2]. “Beginning” refers only to tithes: “The first of your produce” [Deut. 18:4]. “Beginning” refers only to the first fruits: “The first fruits of your land” [Exod. 23:19].

They also said: By the merit of Moses, of whom it says: “He foresaw that the beginning [Torah] was for him” [Deut. 33:19].<sup>237</sup>

All of these commandments partake of a single path, pointing to the oneness of *hokhmah* [wisdom],<sup>238</sup> which is called “beginning.” The Jerusalem translation of the Torah thus renders “In the beginning” as “In wisdom.” The first fruits point to this oneness, as does the commandment of tithing, since the number ten explicates and thus reveals the potency of the One. The dough offering does so too, since it is the single commandment with regard to dough. As for what they said about the merit of Moses, we find a “first” in him as well, and it was from there that he merited to receive the Torah.

If you apply your mind, you will further note that “In the beginning” hints at the building of the first Temple,

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<sup>237</sup> See b. *Baba Batra* 15a.

<sup>238</sup> Although this is nominally the Midrashic section, Bahya already begins to build his argument for a Kabbalistic reading of the verse. Kabbalists so insinuated their readings into the earlier rabbinic tradition that it is sometimes difficult to know where Midrash ends and Kabbalah begins. This, of course, was precisely their intent.

which stood for 410 years.<sup>239</sup> Four hundred ten is also the numerical value of “with this,” as in “With this shall Aaron come into the holy place” [Lev. 16:3]. You know the rabbis said<sup>240</sup> that the Temple was built before heaven and earth; that is why Scripture first says, “In the beginning created” and only then, “heaven and earth.” And because the Temple would one day be destroyed, He said, “The earth was chaotic and void,” since the divine presence was to depart from Israel.

**And a wind from God sweeping over the waters:** refers to Torah, since we have been promised that it will not be forgotten by our offspring, even in exile.<sup>241</sup>

**God said: “Let there be light”** [Gen. 1:3]: This refers to the messianic times, of which Scripture says: “Arise, my light, for your light is come; the glory of the Lord shines upon you” [Isa. 60:1].

**And God distinguished between the light and the darkness** [Gen. 1:4]: For thus would God distinguish between Israel, who hope for salvation, and the nations who abide in darkness. Our rabbis<sup>242</sup> were pointing to this when they found in this verse a reference to the four empires: “The earth was chaotic”—this is the Babylonian

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<sup>239</sup> Thus *bereshit* would consonantly divide into אשג and ת', which numerically equals 410.

<sup>240</sup> b. *Pesahim* 54a.

<sup>241</sup> Here he precedes forward to a Midrashic (mostly eschatological) reading of Gen. 1:3–4.

<sup>242</sup> *Bereshit Rabbah* 2:5.

Empire; “and void”—the Medean Empire; “and darkness”—the Hellenistic Empire; “the deep”—the Roman Empire; “a wind from God”—the spirit of messiah.

The meaning of this midrash is that in this chapter the blessed Lord was foretelling the end from the beginning; Scripture intended to refer to the end of time at the beginning of time, showing that the purpose intended by creation is the messianic time. “The beginning of thought is the end of deed.”<sup>243</sup>

If you apply your mind further, you will note that in *bereshit* [ברשית] one can find the words “fire of the covenant” [*esh berit*; אש רית]. One can also divide it into the two words “created the pit” [*bara shit*; ברא שית], referring to the pits beneath the Temple altar, which were created during the six days of creation.<sup>244</sup> So too: “He created a ram” [*bara tayish*; ברא תיש], referring to the ram of Isaac, that was created during the six days.<sup>245</sup> *Bereshit* could also be derived from *areshet* [ארשת], which means “utterance,” [Ps. 21:3]. Its meaning would be “By ten utterances;” these are the ten statements [“Let there be”] by which the world was created.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> A saying attributed to Aristotle, widely quoted by Jewish thinkers throughout the Middle Ages.

<sup>244</sup> b. *Sukkah* 49a. Again a purely rabbinic reference, but one that has Kabbalistic echoes. The phrase *bara shit* is taken by the Zohar to mean “He created six,” referring to the six *sefirot* clustered around *tiferet*.

<sup>245</sup> Avot 5:6.

<sup>246</sup> Avot 5:1. In the Kabbalah the ten utterances of creation are often homologized into the ten *sefirot*.

Know and understand that the world was created in [the month] Tishre [תשרי]; the word *bereshit* hints at that.<sup>247</sup> On this matter there was a Talmudic debate between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. R. Eliezer said the world was created in Tishre.<sup>248</sup> Even though in debates between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua we generally accept the rulings of R. Joshua, the Talmud already decided this case in favor of R. Eliezer. Thus it says: “According to whose view do we now pray:<sup>249</sup> ‘This day is the beginning of Your deeds?’ According to Rabbi Eliezer.”

**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth:** In accord with the path of reason.

The entirety of reality is comprised of three divisions: the first being the world of the angels; the second that of the heavenly spheres; and the third, this lower world—all three created by the Occult Power. The phrase “in the beginning” alludes to the Occult Power, the beginning of all, the beginningless Primordium. It first created the world of the angels, designated in scriptural texts as divinities [*Elohim*], then the world of the spheres which are “the heavens,” and this lower world which is “the earth.”

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<sup>247</sup> It could be read as *be-tishre*.

<sup>248</sup> And R. Joshua said it was created in Nissan. This debate reflects the dual calendar of Judaism. The Biblical calendar begins in the spring, Aviv or Nissan being the first month. The Babylonian calendar, adopted by Jews at a very early date, starts the year in the fall, with Tishre, the seventh month on the Biblical calendar.

<sup>249</sup> On Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishre. b. *Rosh Hashanah* 10b–11a, 27a.

For this reason the verse does not commence with the divine epithet *Elohim*, stating *Elohim bara bereshit*—God created at first the heavens and the earth. Rather, the verse necessarily reads, *bereshit bara Elohim*—“In the beginning, created *Elohim*,” in order that the verb “created” refer back to the phrase “in the beginning.” From this, the reader will understand that the Occult Power, which is designated by “beginningless primordium” [*reshit*], created the *Elohim*—these being the angels, and the heavens, i.e., the spheres and the earth—the lower world extending from the sphere of the moon downwards, all of its constituents being generically designated by the term “earth.” The succeeding verse clarifies this: “The earth was chaotic and void” [Gen. 1:2]. That is to say that the earth, mentioned generically [in 1:1], was in a state of chaos at its creation. It was matter which received the forms of the four elements alluded to in the verse.

The term “earth” is thus a homonym, referring to both genus and species, as in: “God called the dry land earth” [Gen. 1:10]. If such is the case, read the phrase “and the earth” [Gen. 1:2] as referring to the totality of the four elements, while “unformed and void” refers to the particular element of earth. “Chaotic and void” signifies that the element of earth lacked substantiation.

The reader should know that the heavenly spheres number 945, in accord with the numerical equivalent of the word “the heavens.” So one finds in “The Chapters of the Chariot”:<sup>250</sup> “In the hour when the Holy One, blessed

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<sup>250</sup> Ma ‘aseh Merkavah, Chapter 7, in Wertheimer, *Batthey Midrashot*,

be He, descends from the heavens of the heavens, from nine hundred and forty-five firmaments, and sits upon His throne of glory in Aravot, all of the gates of the firmament and all of the gates of Aravot proclaim: 'O gates, lift up your heads!' [Ps. 24:7]." So too, in the midrash *Derekh Eretz Zuta*:<sup>251</sup> "The Holy One, blessed be He, reigns on high alone. He is one and His name is one and He dwells in three hundred and ninety firmaments, each and every firmament inscribed with His name and its liturgical pronunciation." They quote this name in the context of: "Give ear O you heavens and let me speak!" [Deut. 32:1]. With God's help, I will transcribe this midrash there, but at the very least, I did not want to exclude their number.

According to our teachers, the mystics, the heavens number seven, following tractate *Hagigah* [12a]:

R. Judah says: There are two firmaments, as it says: "The heavens and the heavens of heavens are the Lord your God's" [Deut. 10:14].

Resh Lakish says: "There are seven. These are: Vilon, Raki'a, Shehakim, Zevul, Ma'on, Makhon, Aravot."

The philosophers claim that there are nine. These are the primum mobile, second to whom is the sphere of the

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v. 1, p. 61. Schaefer, *Synopsis zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, v228, paragraph 68.

<sup>251</sup> v. chap. 2.

fixed stars, followed by the seven spheres of the planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury and the moon. The nine spheres are succeeded by the four elements, whose order is fire, air, water and earth and whose mnemonic is *arma* '. Solomon already mentioned them in this order in: "Who has ascended heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hand? Who has wrapped the waters in his garment? Who has established all of the extremities of the earth?" [Prov. 30:4].

The opinion of the philosophers is that the element of fire derives its warmth from the sphere of the moon which is immediately above and adjacent to it. This is on account of the incessant movement of the sphere. For it is known that every moving object warms and ignites everything in its proximity, on account of its constant movement. It is ever more so the case that when the moving object is large and of great might, it will impart enormous and exceedingly powerful heat. Consequently, the sphere of the moon warms and enkindles everything close to it without itself being ignited. Unlike the material substance of the elements, its matter is pure and refined and not receptive of the influence of external affects. For this reason, fire does not ascend infinitely upwards, although it is its nature to ascend above. As its matter is as solid as cast glass, the surface of the sphere blocks it. Fire ascends there to its boundary, which it does not transgress. Similarly, the earth blocks the waters, although it is their nature to descend downwards. Nevertheless, they too do not transgress.

We have already informed you above that the world was created in *Tishre*, whose Zodiac sign is Libra. This

is taught by the second verse: “A wind from God sweeping over the waters.” Libra, as is known, is the sign for air, “sweeping over the waters,” adjacent to Scorpio, the sign for water. The reason they are called Libra [“scales”], Scorpio [“scorpion”], or the others signs, is that stars are grouped in the forms of scales, a scorpion, and so forth. They came to be grouped this way at the time of the flood: a group of stars in the form of a lamb; in the form of a bull; in the form of twins, which is the human form; the form of a crab, which is a sort of creature; in the forms of scales and scorpion; and in the form of a dipper, which is a person dipping water. Afterwards they were called by these names, following the forms they had taken at the time of the flood. It seems that the reason they appeared this way at the time of the flood was that so we be aroused to contemplate divine providence, following from the meaning of these names, as is found in the rabbis’ midrash.

You should also know that the birth-moment [*molad*] of Tishre, when the world was created, would have been on the eve of the second day, in the fifth hour, the 204th part,<sup>252</sup> had the luminaries been created. We can determine this from the *molad* of the Nissan that follows it. But since the luminaries were not created until the fourth day, we know clearly that there never was a second day, fifth hour, 204th part *molad*. Nevertheless, this is the

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<sup>252</sup> The *molad*, or the moment when the moon is directly between earth and sun and thus totally invisible, is the technical beginning of the new month. For purposes of this fixing, the hour divided into 1080 parts.

proper calculation according to the mathematicians. As for what we say in the prayers—“this day is the beginning of Your deeds”—it could apply whether you begin with the second day as stated or with the sixth day and the fourteenth hour.<sup>253</sup> If we begin with this latter count, beginning with the creation of man after the passage of twelve hours of the sixth day’s night and two hours of daytime, the meaning of “the beginning of Your deeds” would refer to Adam’s judgment. Taking the former count, however, “Your deeds” would refer to the second day, the beginning of divine doing, when it says: “God made the firmament” [Gen. 1:7]. On the first day there is no doing, just creating, and the prayer refers to “Your deeds” and not “Your creation.”

**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth:** In accord with the path of [mystical] tradition.

This verse bears within it the mystery of the ten *sefirot*. The “heavens” and the “earth” refer to the supernal heavens and earth, which are not included within the category of the spheres. They are called the primordial heavens and the land of the living.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> The point is that the first of *Tishre* is supposed to be the date when Adam and Eve were created. But since that was the “sixth day” of creation, we have to count back five preceding days to get to the actual Beginning. But it is impossible to do that, to determine the moment of creation other than mathematically, since until the fourth day there were no luminaries which would allow for the demarcation of days.

<sup>254</sup> These are the sixth and tenth *sefirot*: *tiferet* (“splendor”) and *malkhut* (“kingdom”), respectively.

The phrase “in the beginning” [*bereshit*] alludes to Wisdom, as it is written: “Beginning [*reshit*] is Wisdom” [Ps. 111:10]. Similarly, the *bet* of *bereshit* alludes to Wisdom which is the second of the *sefirot*.<sup>255</sup> Thus the first letter and the entire word testify to Wisdom. And because all things are drawn forth and emanate out of Wisdom, the *bet* is written larger than the other letters. For while it may be the second in the sefirotic count, Wisdom is the first in our perception. Thus the *bet* of *bereshit* refers to Wisdom, which is “beginning” [*reshit*], for we are not empowered to think about the *sefirah* which precedes it. For this reason, the first *sefirah* is designated as “Naught” [*Ayin*]. This is the esoteric meaning of [Job 28:20], “Wisdom derives from Naught,” read as a statement rather than as a question. Nonetheless, the upward stroke<sup>256</sup> of the *bet* [ב] alludes to the Naught. For this purpose, the mystics expounded: “They said to the *bet*: ‘Who created you?’ With her upward stroke, she pointed them towards alef” which is *keter*.

Know and understand that the Cause of Causes transcends *keter*. This is the meaning of the statement in the Book of Creation: “Ten mysterious *sefirot*. Ten and not nine. Ten and not eleven.”<sup>257</sup> The meaning of “ten and not nine” is that *keter* is to be included within the totality of

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<sup>255</sup> The numerical value of the letter *bet* is two, alluding to the fact that *hokhmah* is the second rung in the chain of divine emanation.

<sup>256</sup> The beginning of the top line of the letter *bet* points slightly upward.

<sup>257</sup> Sefer Yetsirah 1:1.

the ten *sefirot*. All of the other *sefirot* emanate from it; it is the outflowing source upon which the rest rely. “Ten and not eleven” reveals that the One which transcends *keter* is not to be included within the totality of the ten *sefirot*. This is the Cause of Causes, a hidden entity, which can be designated as neither being nor nothingness. And thus the terminology *'eser sefirot belimah*, the ten *sefirot* of *belimah*—that is to say, emanated from *beli mah*, that which transcends all substantiality. For this reason, the mystics explained the need for a point upward upon the letter Y [י]. It alludes to the Cause of Causes and its transcendence of the entirety of the ten *sefirot*. Since the entirety of the ten are emanated, the Emanator, which is the Cause of Causes, is distinct from them. This is the meaning of “ten and not eleven.”

When *Sefer Yetsirah* says, “Engraved,” but does not say who does the engraving, the reference is to *keter*. That which is engraved consists of three books, three letters inscribed by *keter*, and they are Y-H-V, letters that are blessed and bless every blessed one. They are also *sefer*, *sefor*, and *sippur*.<sup>258</sup> *Sefer* refers to *hokhmah*; it is called *sefer* or “book” because generations pass on and wisdom is preserved only in a book. That is why divine wisdom is referred to as a book. *Sefor* is *binah*, the intellect a person uses for counting. It comes from the meaning “count” as in the word *sefirah*. Thus Scripture says in the Book of Chronicles [II 2:16]: “Solomon counted all the sojourners living in the Land of Israel as his father David had counted them.” *Sippur* refers to the

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<sup>258</sup> Three nominal forms derivable from the root S-F-R [ספר].

remaining *sefirot*, those which can be conceived and discussed by humans.<sup>259</sup> Know that *sefer* is the *Yod*, *sefor* is the *He*, and *sippur* is the *Vav*, which is *tiferet*, the sixth level. Understand this.<sup>260</sup>

It is known that the numerical value of S-F-R is 340. The three forms of S-F-R are thus three terms for mind. Even if their power are diverse, all have the same root. The same is true of the three letters of the the divine name; they too have a single root. They all came out of that single root, the One that engraves the world, *keter*, deriving from the Cause of Causes that is also called “the Endless.” You should contemplate the passage on *Marah* [Exod. 15:22–27], where it says: “There He gave him engraved judgments, and there He tried him” [Exod. 15:25].<sup>261</sup>

**God [Elohim]: Return,**<sup>262</sup> This is the *sefirah* which

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<sup>259</sup> *Sippur* means “tale” or “narration;” these lower *sefirot* can be the subject of narration.

<sup>260</sup> *Vav* [ו] is the sixth letter, representing the number six. *Tiferet* also represents a cluster of six central *sefirot*, those between *binah* and *malkhut*. *binah* and *malkhut* are the upper and lower female *sefirot*. The six forces between them are a male cluster; the form of the letter *vav* may itself be understood as a symbol of masculinity.

<sup>261</sup> The word “there” [אם; *sham*] appears twice in the verse, along with “gave” [נתן; *sam*]. Each of these is numerically 340, representing *sefer*, *sefor*, and *sippur*. This passage, which is taken by the midrash as representing a pre-Sinaitic giving of law and teachings, here is seen as the moment when the sefirotic secrets of Kabbalah are handed over to Israel.

<sup>262</sup> The term is *teshuvah*, meaning “return to God” or “penitence.”

created the world [of emanation]. The intentionality of our prayers is directed towards Return on Rosh ha-Shanah. In “Abraham prayed to God” [Gen. 20:17], the intention is towards the final H of the tetragrammaton.<sup>263</sup> So it is too with David the King, peace be upon him, “As for me, I will call to God” [Ps. 55:17]. However, in Proverbs—“You shall call out to Understanding as to a mother” [Prov. 2:3]—the intention is toward Return. And Return is called Understanding [*binah*] because it is situated between [*ben*] the five higher *sefirot*.<sup>264</sup> Both “I will call” and “You shall call” refer to prayer as in: “Abraham called there to the Lord” [Gen. 13:4]. The Aramaic translation of call is *tsalei*—he prayed.

**The Heavens and the Earth:** The direct object indicators [*et* and *ve-et*] include Greatness and Might.<sup>265</sup> “The heavens” refers to Splendor,<sup>266</sup> which is Eden. The two columns Perdurance and Majesty<sup>267</sup> are included in the word Heavens—that is to say, the heavens and its two

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The kabbalists give it a cosmic meaning: the return of all things to their source. This third *sefirah*, here designated as *teshuvah*, but more often called *binah*, is that primal source to which all return.

<sup>263</sup> *Malkhut*, the tenth *sefirah*.

<sup>264</sup> That is, she is the middle of five.

<sup>265</sup> *Gedullah* and *gevurah*, the fourth and fifth *sefirot*, also known as *hesed* (“grace”) and *din* (“judgment”), the right and left “hands” of the divine.

<sup>266</sup> *Tiferet*, the sixth *sefirah*.

<sup>267</sup> *Netzah* and *hod*, the seventh and eighth *sefirot*.

columns. Since we have not found any mention of the creation of the columns of heaven, we must conclude that they were included in the totality of the heavens. The Righteous One<sup>268</sup> was also included with them as it is the column sustaining the world. Or it is possible to contend that the addition of the “and” of “and the earth” serves to include these three columns.

**And the Earth:** This is the Garden<sup>269</sup> which receives from Eden.

**And the earth was chaotic and empty:** Scripture now mentions that which first existed. The [tenth *sefirah*] is designated “earth” because she is the conclusion of the edifice of emanation. The past tense “was” indicates that the essence of her existence is derived from that prior existent which is Wisdom, anteceding all. Chaos is Understanding, the green plumbline encompassing the entirety of the world. The Void, indicating that which is beginning to be formed, this is Greatness. And darkness, this is divine Might.

This text [Gen. 1:1] also bears within it an intimation concerning the temporal duration of the world, a fact well known from the saying of our sages of blessed memory “The world exists for six thousand years and lies destroyed for a millennium.”<sup>270</sup> The wise will understand. Thus Scripture states immediately thereafter “And the earth was chaotic and void” [Gen. 1:2] to allude to the

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<sup>268</sup> *Zaddik* or *yesod* (“foundation”), the ninth *sefirah*.

<sup>269</sup> *Malkhut* (“kingdom”), the tenth and feminine receptive *sefirah*.

<sup>270</sup> b. *Rosh Hashanah* 31a.

millennium of desolation. One furthermore finds in the first syllables of the forty-two letter name of God derived from these verses intimation that the world created in six days will be destroyed and desolated.<sup>271</sup>

Realize that the verse does not explicate what preceded the creation of the heavens as it does for the earth. However, from the explication of the earth one can understand the heavens. Upon this it relied and thus kept its quiet, neither mentioning the heavens nor explaining what the spheres were before they came to their consummation in their current form.

However, in accord with the mystical tradition which I intimated to you is true, [it is] firmly established and fitting that the matter of the heavens was not explicated. For they are the heavenly Eden.<sup>272</sup> How can one explicate that which came first, when the sages have expounded: “No eye has seen O God, save You, what you have made for those who trust in You’ [Isa. 64:3]: this is Eden which no eye has ever seen.”<sup>273</sup> Therefore, the verse revealed the matter but concealed the hidden things while speaking at length concerning the revealed. Understand this well. The heavens and the earth of the first verse of Genesis are Splendor and Crown [*tiferet* and *malkhut*], they are Eden and the Garden. This is the meaning of the midrash that the Garden of Eden was created before the

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<sup>271</sup> ABG (numerically “six”) *yitats* (“he will destroy”).

<sup>272</sup> The reference is to *binah*, the third *sefirah*, which is the source of the six lower *sefirot*, “the heavens.”

<sup>273</sup> b. *Berakhot* 34a.

world.<sup>274</sup> If this is the case of the Garden, how much the more so of Eden, in which the Garden was planted? As it is written: “The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east” [Gen. 2:8].

You must know that we possess a tradition regarding this verse of *bereshit*, extending down to *bohu*, that it is the source of the forty-two letter name associated with divine judgment. It comes about through many permutations of letters, but if you enlighten your heart you will find in it the count of two, five, and 204 which I mentioned above. It is inscribed in the text, and between each of its four letters there are forty-two letters. The intelligent person will understand that this is no coincidence, but a complete demonstration that the world was created. This was “before the mountains were born” [Ps. 90:2].<sup>275</sup> There was no 2, 5, 204, but only the cosmic force of justice in its place, operating with no instrument but bringing forth the instrument of its deeds. This is understood.

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<sup>274</sup> b. *Pesahim* 54a.

<sup>275</sup> Various letters in this verse refer to the count of 2, 5, 204.

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